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THE ANSWER TO A
CHRISTMAS PRAYER

ILLUSTRATED

BY ANNIE S. SWAN

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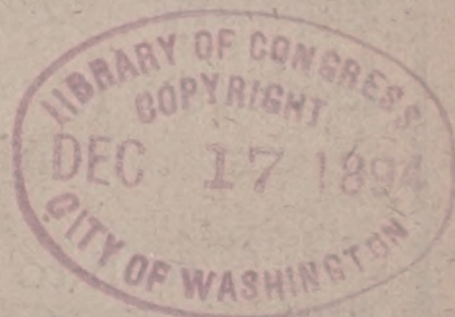
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THE ANSWER TO A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

BY
ANNIE S. SWAN

*40
Once a week*

"And the songs that echo longest,
Deepest, fullest, truest, strongest,
With your life-blood you will write."—F. R. H.



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THE ANSWER TO A CHRISTMAS PRAYER.

CHAPTER I.

A HUSBAND and wife sat late together by a dying fire, discussing ways and means; perplexity and deep anxiety writ large on their faces and finding expression in the hopeless melancholy tone of their voices. They were not old, but life had been to them that long and continuous struggle which leaves indelible marks behind. They sat in a shabby, though homelike room, and they wore worn and shabby clothes. Yet they looked well cared for and neat. The wife was one of those thin, wiry little creatures who possess astonishing staying and enduring powers, though outward appearance belies it. In her youth she had been distinguished by a certain prettiness which had not remained; her hair, once soft and golden, clustering in little ripples above her brows, was now dull, and plain, and thin; her cheek had lost its soft contour; her mouth wore the grave,

harsh lines indicative of much poring over many hard problems. She had borne six children, all of whom lived; the youngest, five years old, was still the baby of the house. Her husband was several years her senior, and looked his age to the full. He was a gentle, mild-mannered, undistinguished-looking person, with a pale, soft face, scanty gray hair, and weak-looking eyes protected by a very ugly pair of dark-colored spectacles. He wore the ordinary garb of a city man, and the frock-coat—well cut at the beginning, still looked respectable, though it was glazed and threadbare at the seams. He had been a city clerk for five-and-thirty years, and the awful monotony of his daily existence had left its impress on him, and had successfully crushed out such individuality as Nature had bestowed upon him. He was now simply a machine, wound up daily for the benefit of the great house of Deverill & Company, in whose service he had been since his boyhood. He had served the firm faithfully and well, giving the best that was in him for a meager salary, and now that he was old and unfit, the usual fate had befallen him—he found himself supplanted; and he had brought his burden home with him for the first time that day, and laid it upon his wife's faithful heart. And it had caused a bright spot

of indignation to rise in her faded cheek, and a most unusual light to flash in her gentle eye.

“Hard, Reginald!” she exclaimed, giving her needle and thread an expressive jerk. “It is worse than hard—it is cruel, wicked, unjust; and I would tell Mr. Deverill so myself if I could see him. I have a very good mind—a very good mind—to go down to Cornhill to-morrow myself to tell him so.”

“It would do no good, Lucy, none at all,” he said, with that gentle patience born of years of repression; “Mr. Deverill is a hard man, and has always been, and of course we can’t expect anybody to pay for unsatisfactory work. I have known for some time that my service has been very poor, and it has been bitter to me, very bitter, to admit it.”

He got up from his chair with a certain restlessness and walked across the floor, his wife’s eyes following him with sympathy which only indignation kept from tears.

“To think that you have served them with such faithfulness for forty years, and that they should serve you like this. It’s—it’s disgraceful, and they’ll be made to suffer for it. Mr. Deverill will have a curse with his millions for it.”

“Hush, hush! Lucy. Remember he hasn’t

cast me off quite penniless, he has offered me a pension."

"But fifty pounds a year—only a house-rent! and where's the food and the clothes and the boys' education to come from? Why, Reginald, what shall we *do*?"

All her despair centered in the last word, and she let her hands fall helplessly in her lap, and the wrinkles seemed to deepen on her brow, the lines about her mouth grew more pitifully hard. Her husband, accustomed to see in her a continual self-possession, regarded her perplexedly. If she failed him in this crisis, what would become of him, of them all?

"Lucy," he said, hesitatingly, and with a certain air of distress, "don't give way. What will become of us, my dear, if you give way?"

She recovered herself instantly.

"I was not giving way, Reginald, but the situation is serious. Fifty pounds a year; and nobody earning anything but Philippa, and Stansfield's career will have to be stopped. It is very hard."

Stansfield was the eldest son, though second in the family, and was a lad of good parts, and his mother had been pardonably ambitious for him.

"It will," answered the careworn father with

a sigh. "But I always thought Oxford for Stansfield an impossible thing. It takes a great deal more money, Lucy, than you or any of us imagine; and unless a lad can take his place with his compeers, it is no great kindness to him to send him there. He has to suffer so many humiliations."

"I am sure Stansfield would not have minded that, Reginald, if he could have had the other advantages."

"He is just like other lads, Lucy; more high-spirited than some. But we need not discuss that now, seeing it has become impossible. Although I have to leave Deverill's, I need not necessarily remain an idle man. I may get something to do which will still enable me to help."

His wife's eyes filled with tears. She did not like to say, though the same thought was in both their minds, that that was a very slender chance, indeed. What use has the busy world for the man past his prime, and whose failing powers are evident in his very face. It is one of the saddest spectacles of the modern world — the casting aside of the old when they are no longer fit to bear the burden and heat of the day. So intolerable is it to some sensitive souls that they learn to regard Death as their gentlest friend.

"We can talk of that another time, Reginald.

Did Mr. Deverill say when he wished you to leave?"

"He did not exactly say I was to leave, Lucy. He put it more delicately than I expected. He offered me another post, but I could not accept it, dear. God forgive me if I am too proud, but I could not take a more subordinate place than I have filled, at least in that house. I said I should prefer to leave."

"You were quite right. I could not bear it for you, either," she replied, promptly. "I dare say we shall manage it somehow. Did he say anything about Philippa?"

"Nothing about Philippa," he replied, and an odd silence fell upon each.

"She continues to give satisfaction in the office, I trust, Reginald," said Mrs. Craven, anxiously. "I hope there is no possibility of her being discharged at this juncture. Her salary is a very substantial help."

"I don't think she will be discharged. She is a great favorite, anybody can see that; and there is no doubt that she is far too good for the place."

"Well, that is something. I think we had better go to bed, Reginald; it is nearly midnight; and everything will look brighter in the morning."

He assented, and immediately proceeded to lock up windows and doors, while his wife went upstairs. It had been her custom for many years to pay a visit every night to the rooms occupied by the children, though they, sleeping soundly, were generally unconscious of her presence.

She went last to the room, the old nursery of the house, where Philippa now slept with her little sister Lucy. As Mr. Craven, still looking worried and anxious, came upstairs, his wife called to him softly from the upper landing:

“Come and look at Philippa; it will do you good. It is quite a picture.”

Together they entered the room, and together stood by the bed, where the two girls lay asleep. Philippa, dark as the queen whose name she bore, and the little Lucy, fair and pale, lying close to her, the two heads on the same pillow, both sound asleep. Philippa was twenty-four, and she looked her years to the full. Her face was grave, even sad, in repose, and on the long, dark lashes which swept her cheek a tear glistened, which moved her father's heart.

“She is a beautiful girl, Reginald. She ought to have had a chance.”

“What kind of chance?” he asked, a vague, intolerable yearning stirring in his heart.

“A chance to do well for herself, to marry well.”

“She is young enough, Lucy,” he said, with a sudden impatience in his voice. “But I wish—I wish I could have given her a brighter girlhood.”

CHAPTER II.

THE Cravens lived at Clapton—a most unfashionable suburb it is true, but it had many advantages in their eyes. Houses were cheap, and a good school was at hand; then they seemed quite near to the country and they had the river Lea, a perpetual joy, almost at their door. Daily Philippa and her father journeyed to Liverpool Street by the half-past eight train, which Reginald Craven had never missed. Breakfast, consequently, was an early meal, the family being gathered about the table generally at half-past seven. They had no servant now—since Anna the second girl had left school; in winter they breakfasted cozily in the kitchen, thus saving both light and fire. Although means were straitened, they were by no means a dull or depressed circle, few merrier households were to be found. Many simple pleasures were theirs, all the sweeter

because so hardly earned. Then they were a singularly united and happy family, to whom home was truly the dearest place on earth. By six o'clock in the morning Mrs. Craven heard Philippa astir, and, lying wide awake listening to the two girls busy about their household tasks, she told herself she was blessed in her children. For more than a year she had tasted the luxury of coming downstairs to a bright fire and a tastily prepared breakfast, and though Philippa might have pleaded her long working day as an excuse for tarrying in the morning, she never missed her self-appointed task of preparing the morning meal, and, to please her devoted daughter, the little mother lay still until she was called. It was a November morning, and the light was still gray with the night shadows as the little family, less cheerful than usual, gathered round the table. Mrs. Craven had the most comfortable and sheltered chair near the fire, her husband sat opposite to her. Philippa presided at the tea tray, and the other members of the family sat where they chose, Stansfield usually by his mother's side. He was a tall, fine looking lad, more like Philippa than any of the rest. Anna, two lank, long-limbed boys, and the little Lucy completed the circle.

“It's going to rain this morning, dad,” said

Philippa, as she filled him a second cup. "In fact it's raining now. Did you bring your mackintosh home last night?"

"No, my dear! I forgot it," he replied.

"Have mine, dad; I can do without," said Stansfield. "Besides, I don't go in till twelve to-day, and it may be fine by then."

"I wish I could afford a new mackintosh," said Philippa; "mine is so dreadfully shabby, but I must put it on to save my gown."

She looked down approvingly at her new neat gown of blue serge, which was to be her wearing and working dress for the next six months. It was a plain gown, but of good material and well made. In it Philippa looked particularly lady-like and well-dressed, and she felt it; always a comfortable sensation to a womanly woman. Philippa was neither vain nor frivolous, but she believed that every woman ought to dress as becomingly and expensively as means will admit, and she thought a good deal about her own clothes, chiefly perhaps because she had to show the best possible results from the smallest possible means. And that is always a serious problem in small matters as well as great. Her father and mother thought her beautiful, but she was not so in the strict sense of the word. Looking at her casually, she appeared

a fresh simple English girl, void of affectation or pretension, attractive chiefly because of her youth and her perfect health. Yet there was something more, a suggestion of strength and possibility in her face, a firm decisiveness about the mouth when closed, and a grave clearness of vision in her eyes, which indicated a woman of character who in emergency would probably develop qualities unlooked for and unexpected. Though she said nothing, she observed a deeper shade than usual in her father's face, an added expression of care in her mother's eyes, and when she and her father walked toward the dreary little Clapton station in the drizzling rain, she put the question to him straightly. "There's something worrying you and mother, dad; what is it? I thought you had something on your mind last night, and now I know it."

"There is a good deal worrying me, child," he replied, shifting his umbrella to keep off the beating rain. "I don't know that I ought to tell you just yet."

"You'd better, dad," she said quietly, "or I shall go imagining all sorts of things. I hope it isn't that you're going to be ill."

She looked with affectionate apprehension at the bent shoulders, and the pale face to which

the raw morning air had given a bluish tinge, and thought how rapidly he was growing old.

“No, no, my health, thank God, is as good as it ever was—or nearly,” he said, correcting himself. “My eyesight is the only thing that has failed me sadly, and of course that is most important. I have made a good many mistakes, I know, but still it is rather hard.”

“What is, father?”

“Well, I suppose I must tell you. Every one will know sooner or later. Mr. Deverill gave me notice to quit yesterday.”

“Father, he never did!”

Surprise, indignation, just anger, struggled together in her voice.

“He did, my love; but here we are, and there’s Benham and the rest. Try not to think any more about it just now. It’s not immediate anyhow, only he said the firm had decided that a change early in the New Year would be desirable.”

Philippa said nothing, and she had a very absent salutation for the fellow-passengers with whom they had traveled so regularly that they seemed like friends.

Huddled up in the corner of the dingy second-class carriage, she pondered many things in her heart with a bitterness which showed itself in



"THERE IS A GOOD DEAL WORRYING ME, CHILD."

her face. She had no further opportunity for conversation with her father, for two of their fellow-passengers walked with them to Cornhill, only leaving them at the door of Deverill's.

"Let's go together for lunch to-day, dad—to an A.B.C. shop," Philippa whispered, as they passed through the folding doors together. "I want to hear all about it; you really ought to have told me last night."

With a reproving shake of the head and a somewhat unsteady smile, she left him and went to her own department—the commodious room where the letters were type-written and where her three companions were already at their tables. Philippa was fairly happy in her work, though its gray monotony sometimes depressed her young soul. But she was wont to still such vague rebellions with the thought of the hundreds in the great city who were willing to work and could find nothing to do. The sense of duty and obligation was deeply implanted in her heart, and for the sake of the father and mother who made the home as happy as they could, she was thankful that she had found a place where she could earn her bread. The other three girls, though liking Philippa Craven very well for her kindness of heart and her habitual evenness of temper, stood just a little in awe of her, and at times

felt her to be a check upon their girlish chatter. The clerks in the counting-house were objects of intense interest to them. Philippa seemed to be unaware of their existence; and, so contrary is mankind, on this very account she was much more interesting to the counting-house than the others, whose smile and recognition never failed. After the usual morning greetings, Philippa relapsed into absolute silence, and never opened her mouth once till lunch time. She had much to engross her thoughts, and to account for the unusual knitting of her brows, for if Mr. Deverill carried out his intention and dismissed her father, the problems of the future became more complicated than ever. She had, of late years, seen sufficient of city life to know that failing powers have no market value, but are cast aside without remorse in favor of youth and strength, and though it seemed intolerably hard, she knew it to be inevitable. As she performed her mechanical duties to the music of the machines she thought of every conceivable plan, feasible and absurd, whereby the catastrophe might be averted, or at least lessened, and her face wore so grave and preoccupied a look that it acted like a charm on the others and kept them quiet. Once the door opened and a tall, well-preserved, and decidedly handsome gentleman of middle age looked into

the room, causing a flutter in every heart but Philippa's; she did not suffer her eyes to dwell on his face, though it was at her Mr. Martin Deverill, the head of the firm, looked with an interest he made no attempt to conceal. While the other three with secret flutterings and trembling hands bent over their work, Philippa never changed expression or attitude, which was proud, distant, defiant even.

Mr. Martin Deverill did not linger, but as he passed through the counting-house requested Reginald Craven to follow him to his room.

CHAPTER III.

REGINALD CRAVEN expected nothing but the confirmation of his dismissal, and entered his employer's room with a very perturbed expression on his face.

"Shut the door, Craven, and sit down," said Mr. Deverill. "I have a great deal to say to you this morning."

Craven did so, and his attitude as he sank into the chair was that of a man who had parted with hope.

Mr. Deverill remained standing eyeing his

subordinate keenly, and even with a faint expression of pity in his eyes. Seeing how Craven almost trembled in his presence, he gave a sudden consciousness of power. Yes, in his own domain Mr. Martin Deverill was certainly a great man, holding many destinies in his hands. His first question was calculated to surprise Craven very much, and it did.

“How old would you suppose me to be, Craven?” inquired Mr. Deverill, calmly.

“Sir, of course I know your age. I was here when you entered the office, and you were then twenty-one.”

“How long is that ago?”

“It will be thirty-one years, sir, on the fifteenth of March next.”

“You have the dates very correctly,” said Mr. Deverill, with a dry, inscrutable smile. “That makes me fifty-two, doesn’t it? My birthday falls in April, on the fourteenth of April I shall be fifty-two—not a very old man, Craven, eh?”

“You don’t look even that, sir,” replied Reginald Craven. “You have hardly a gray hair; you are just ten years younger than I.”

“Ten years, am I? so you are sixty-two, and you look your years. Well, perhaps I have taken my ease where it was denied you; but I have had my serious troubles also. Tell me, what did

they say at home about our talk yesterday? Have you told your wife and family?"

Craven felt much surprised at the evident friendly interest expressed in his employer's look and tone. Though they had been associated for thirty years, there was not the remotest semblance of friendship or familiarity between them. Their relations were purely those of business, incrustated with an unusually large amount of formality. Martin Deverill, holding himself aloof so sternly from all his employés, even the most trusted, had well earned the reputation of being hard and proud. He knew absolutely nothing of them except in a business capacity, taking not the smallest interest in any of their affairs. There was thus no bond of affection between the great house of Deverill and those who worked to carry out its ambitions, though those who had served in it for so many years felt a certain attachment, merely that of habit, to the place.

"I told my wife last night, of course," replied Craven, a trifle stiffly—curiously resenting the question.

"And what did she say? How did she receive it?"

"She was as might have been expected—considerably distressed."

“How many children have you?”

“Six, sir.”

“And is your daughter who is employed here the eldest?”

“She is.”

“What age is the youngest?”

“Five years.”

“Only five, and you are sixty-two. You have given hostages to fortune rather late in life.”

“I know it,” replied Craven, a trifle sadly. “I was forty before I married, through lack of means, and my poor wife has known but little ease these twenty years.”

“Let me see, what has your salary been?”

“Two hundred and fifty, sir, for the last ten years.”

“I suppose Mrs. Craven felt rather indignant at the idea of your dismissal?”

“She did, sir, naturally, more so than I. Women look at these things from a standpoint of sentiment, not admissible in business relations.”

“I suppose so; and what did your daughter say?”

“My daughter said nothing. I told her only this morning as we walked to the station.”

“But she no doubt will feel equally indignant. I saw it in the way she regarded me this morn-

ing. A woman of strong character I should imagine her to be—”

“Philippa!” said Reginald Craven, in faint surprise. “She is a very good girl, a most dutiful daughter, an affectionate sister. We are blessed in our daughter, Mr. Deverill—in all our children, but especially in her.”

“Blessed as I am cursed,” said Mr. Deverill, slowly and with a concentrated bitterness which drove the imperturbable expression from his face. “Do you know anything of my domestic relations, Craven? Have any whispers of the state of affairs in Essex reached this office?”

“None, sir,” replied Craven, slowly and in extreme surprise.

“You must know, however, that I am a widower, and have been for eight years. I have two children—a son and daughter.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Craven, careful not to throw too much curiosity into his voice.

“I made a foolish marriage—as other men have done—and I reaped the bitter fruits of it. I have not had a day’s happiness or peace these twenty years.”

“Sir, I am sorry to hear it,” replied Craven, and his heart, tender by his own domestic peace, softened to the rich man whose money could not purchase peace of mind.

“I have two children, as I said, a son and daughter; they are entirely beyond my control.”

“How old are they?”

“The boy, Wingate, is nineteen, Alicia is seventeen.”

“Do they live at home?”

“Not at present. Wingate is in the country with a tutor, Alicia boarding with a cousin of mine at Cambridge; but I wish soon to have them both at home.”

Craven remained silent, not through any lack of interest, but because a confidence so unusual and unexpected perplexed him.

“I am going to bring them home, and I suppose Wingate will come here; but what is to become of my daughter? You have not seen my place in Essex. It is a beautiful spot, but quiet and retired. She must have a companion. What would you advise me to do?”

“I should advise you, Mr. Deverill, to marry again without the slightest delay.”

Mr. Deverill's face promptly brightened, and Craven could not help thinking what a pleasant face it was when softened by a smile.

“I have thought of it; but the risks are great. My experience was so unhappy that it has made a nervous man of me so far as matrimony is concerned.”

“Was the lady unsuitable?”

“Entirely so. I married my wife, as some other fools have done, from the Variety stage. The result was shipwreck and disaster. I have all my life been striving to counteract inherited tendencies in my children, I fear without success. They have missed a mother’s care.”

“It is not too late to give it to them still.”

Deverill shook his head.

“I fear it is; but not too late to try the experiment of pure, wholesome companionship, youthful companionship especially, for my daughter.”

“What would you, then, propose to do?”

“I thought of one plan, which I shall submit to you first. Do you think your daughter would accept the post of companion to my daughter?”

“She might, sir; I cannot say,” replied Craven; and so great was his surprise he did not know what to say.

“It would be no sinecure, Alicia has a trying temper; it is evident that something must be done, and that at once.”

“Well, I can speak to Philippa, if you like,” said Craven.

“There is another way,” said Mr. Deverill—and the color rose rather quickly in his face—“I might marry again, as you suggest. I confess that seems the easiest solution of the difficulty.

It would give the lady an assured position in the house and so secure her influence."

"It would," murmured Craven, wondering whither all this most unusual communicativeness tended.

Suddenly Mr. Deverill looked him very straightly in the face and said bluntly—

"Will you give me your daughter for my wife?"

CHAPTER IV.

CRAVEN'S surprise was too great for words. He could only stare helplessly at his employer, wondering whether he had heard aright.

"You know nothing about Philippa, sir," he managed to stammer at length.

Mr. Deverill smiled.

"She has been here two years, and during that time I have not been quite unobservant. Besides, a good daughter, they say, makes a good wife. Have I your permission to speak to Miss Craven?"

"I should like, if you please, to think it over, and consult my wife."

"Certainly. I should like to make your wife's acquaintance. Shall I say to-morrow evening,

and will you mention the matter to your daughter before I come?"

"I will," murmured Craven, feeling like a man in a dream.

"I would not wish to seem to bribe, Craven, but at the same time there would be advantages to your family through such an alliance. You would, of course, remain here. The suggestion to make a change came from Selwyn, not from me; but of course there would be no more said about it."

Craven had his own thoughts, not untinged by bitterness; but he gave them no voice.

"My daughter shall not be urged to sacrifice herself for me, or for her family, Mr. Deverill," he said, with a certain dignity Deverill had never seen in him before. "She must be allowed free choice, must not be biased in the smallest degree."

"Certainly; I should wish that myself. I can at least promise you that, should your daughter think favorably of the matter I shall do all a man can for her happiness."

Craven looked at him with a certain wistfulness; then silently bowed his head and took a step toward the door. He would have liked to ask whether there was any question of affection in the matter, whether her many lovely qualities

of heart and mind had made their impress on the somewhat hard heart of the great city magnate. But the words died on his lips, and he went dumbly back to his stool in the counting-house, to do no more work that day. When business hours were over he waited as usual for Philippa in the outer warehouse. They had not lunched together, Craven sending a message that he could not spare the time. As Philippa came along the corridor past the counting-house door, Mr. Deverill appeared at the doorway of his private room. She was about to pass without word or look, as she had done many times before, the head of the firm not having hitherto encouraged even ordinary courtesies in his employes, when to her surprise he spoke to her by name.

“Will you step in here for one moment, Miss Craven?” he asked, not in his usual slightly pompous, always arbitrary tone. Looking faintly surprised she obeyed; and when the door was closed she felt a trifle embarrassed by the steadfastness of his look.

“Your father has a very important matter to discuss with you this evening, Miss Craven,” he said at length. “May I beg that you will give it at least careful consideration?”

She looked at him with straight, clear eyes, and asked simply :

“Do you mean his dismissal from this place?”

“No, though it may, nay, would affect that.”

Philippa waited a moment, plainly asking further explanation, but none came. Then she made a hurried, nervous appeal:

“Oh, sir, consider the injustice. He has served you faithfully for forty years. It is not, cannot be right. I am sure if you will only consider it, you will see the injustice.”

Mr. Deverill looked embarrassed, even distressed. Philippa looked so beautiful at the moment, with the flush of her agitation on her cheek, that he felt a curious stirring of the heart.

“Dear Miss Craven, it is an injustice which shall not take place. I promise you that, if you in turn will promise the matter I have referred to your kind, if possible your favorable, consideration. It is one which affects my happiness deeply.”

She looked at him innocently, not having the faintest idea of his meaning.

“Of course I will,” she replied. “Anything which will help my dear father I will do cheerfully, Mr. Deverill; you must believe that.”

“I trust—I believe so,” he said, hurriedly. Then Philippa with a slight good-evening turned to go. To her surprise he offered her his hand, in which she laid her own a moment ere she



“WILL YOU STEP IN HERE FOR ONE MOMENT, MISS CRAVEN?”

passed out. Something in his face, in the unusually keen glance of his eye, disturbed her, and she was conscious of a vague discomfort in her mind.

“Surely you have been detained, Philippa,” her father said, as she joined him in the warehouse.

“Yes, by Mr. Deverill. He says, dear daddy, that you will not be dismissed. I thanked him, of course, but there is something in the affair, and in his demeanor, I cannot understand.”

Craven winced, and to hide the flush which came to his face he took Philippa’s mackintosh from her arm and put it round her shoulders.

“Shall we take a ’bus, dad?” she asked, peering out into the bitter, drenching rain.

“No, let us walk, if you don’t mind. Come under my umbrella.”

They trudged away together along the muddy pavement, two units in the great throng pressing homeward after the day’s toil.

“Philippa, my dear, tell me what Mr. Deverill said to you,” began Craven, almost in a whisper. “Did he—did he surprise you very much?”

“A little, daddy. I thought his manner odd, but he is always odd, more or less. What he meant by telling you yesterday you would be dismissed, and telling me to-day you wouldn’t, I can’t think. But I told him quite straight

that I thought it horribly unjust after forty years' service."

"You did! and what did he say?" inquired Craven, with almost painful eagerness.

"Not much; he looked rather meek, and do you know, daddy—such silly creatures as we are after all—I could not help thinking Mr. Deverill the handsomest man I had ever seen, and I never even thought of it before. And now tell me," she said almost gayly, for a load was lifted from her heart, "what is this great matter you have to communicate to me, and for which he almost humbly begged my kind consideration? Fancy, Mr. Deverill begging for anything, and from me, dad! I confess to being hopelessly mystified."

"You have not the slightest idea, then?"

"Not the slightest," she replied, and they stood a moment at the edge of the wet pavement waiting to cross the street.

"I am afraid to tell you, Philippa. Can't you guess?"

"Couldn't possibly, dear; out with it."

"Well, Mr. Deverill wishes to marry you," replied Craven, nervously, and just then Philippa's laugh, girlish and clear as a bell, rang out, causing one or two to look at them amusedly.

"Oh, dad, don't cram, as Stan says. At your time of life such jokes are not seemly."

“It’s no joke, my dear. I—I rather wish it were,” he said, with a kind of helpless air which touched Philippa’s heart. At the same time a slow, shamed color began to steal into her cheek.

“Do you mean to say, dad, that there is any truth in what you say?”

“It is quite true, Philippa. Mr. Deverill asked me to-day if I would speak to you, and he is coming to-morrow night for your answer,” said Craven, desperately. “Here we are.”

He was thankful that they had reached the station, thankful that the bustle there prevented further speech, and that the carriage was full. He scarcely dared look at Philippa, but once casting a glance in her direction, he saw that the flush upon her cheek remained. A neighbor walked with them to the very door of their house in Clapton Road, when Philippa, who had never uttered a word, bade him a hurried good-night. Mrs. Craven, who listened always for the creaking swing of the garden gate, ran as usual to open the door and welcome them home. To her no small amazement and dismay Philippa, the moment she saw her mother’s sweet face, burst into tears.

CHAPTER V.

PHILIPPA did not go to business next day. After a sleepless night she fell into a deep slumber in the early morning, from which her mother did not wake her till eleven o'clock, when she entered the room with a small breakfast-tray. When she drew up the blind, the sun shining with most unusual brilliance after a November storm, streamed into the room and fell across Philippa's face, causing her to awake with a start.

"Why, mother, it is quite light. What o'clock is it? It is not Sunday, is it? And why do you bring me breakfast?" she asked confusedly, getting upon her elbow.

"No, my dear, it is not Sunday. I heard you walking about in the night, and I did not let Anna awake you, that is all."

"And has father gone?"

"Yes, my love, it is eleven o'clock. When

you have taken this you will be able to get up, feeling rested, I am sure."

The careful mother, in whom were visible some signs of mental agitation, put a dressing-jacket round her daughter's shoulders, and, having placed the tray before her, sat down on the edge of the bed.

Philippa pushed back her dark hair from her brow, took a drink from her tea-cup, and then looked at her mother's careworn face with a faint, inexpressibly sweet smile.

"It has to be decided to-day, mother, before six o'clock. I think my mind is almost made up."

"Not to have him, I hope, my love. Your father and I hope that will be your decision."

Philippa crumbled a piece of toast in her fingers, and kept her eyes on her plate.

"It would mean so much, mother dear—ease for you and daddy, Oxford for Stansfield, and ever so many things."

"And what for you, dear? that is more important than any or all of these."

"The situation interests me. It is so full of possibility," said Philippa, musingly. "I have always felt, mother, that my future would not be commonplace. What daddy has told me about Miss Deverill has interested me very much."

“No doubt, but the other matter; your relations with Mr. Deverill are of infinitely more importance. Think of it, dear, to live with him as your husband, as I have lived with your father all these years. It is a relation requiring trust, and patience, and love—above all, love. It is impossible you can love Mr. Deverill.”

“I don’t; but I respect him; and I think there is a soft side to him. I have made up my mind to marry him.”

Looking at Philippa’s face, Mrs. Craven imagined it changed; that its girlishness had gone; that the resolution of womanhood was there. She sighed. We do not like to lose our children thus, to wake up one day finding we have to meet them on the common platform of manhood or womanhood; that they are no longer the little ones over whom we have watched and prayed.

“Experiments are always risky, Philippa—in matrimony especially so; in fact, they nearly always turn out disastrously. It is an estate requiring many solid guarantees. I cannot see that you have much guarantee of happiness as the wife of Mr. Deverill.”

“I hope you will be mistaken, mother. He has always been unhappy, disappointed in his home life; such experiences warp the best nat-

ures. It is just possible I may be able to bring all that is best in him to the surface; anyhow, I shall try."

Mrs. Craven looked at her daughter perplexedly, feeling that she did not quite understand her. Simple-minded and true-hearted herself, she preferred a path in life offering fewer complications. She wondered at Philippa's calm weighing of possibilities, and she did not quite like it.

"Then your mind is quite made up to accept Mr. Deverill?"

"I think so, mother; but all will depend on the interview this evening," replied Philippa, calmly.

"And what has led you to make this decision so calmly and quickly?" inquired the mother, anxiously.

Philippa lifted her frank, serious eyes to her mother's face.

"Mother dear, I don't know, but I do not feel any hesitation. I even feel as if the decision had been made for me. I am not in the least unhappy, and it will mean a great deal to us all."

"It is not wealth and position that have tempted you, dear? Remember these are mere baubles powerless to buy happiness or peace of mind."

“It is not that, mother, I can truthfully say; only I feel that my destiny has come to me—that is all,” replied Philippa. “Now I must get up. This is most unheard-of indulgence for me.”

Having satisfied her conscience by giving her daughter her sincere advice, and feeling that she had been gently set aside, Mrs. Craven began to look at the other side of the picture, upon which she had not as yet permitted herself to dwell. She pictured her daughter the mistress of Mr. Deverill’s splendid home; and of all the advantages inseparable from such a position. And she went about her commonplace duties that day like a woman in a dream. As the day wore on the sunshine departed, and the rain began to fall fine and still from a gray sky unrelieved by any ray of brightness. About four o’clock Philippa put on an old cloak and felt hat, and went down to the river-side, to a little boathouse kept by an old man who had two punts for hire. He had lived by the Lea all his days, and had seen the monotonous London suburb grow up on the banks of the river, and had many moral reflections to make upon these manifold changes. He had taught Philippa to row, and was wont to tell of her skill with pride, and to point her out of an evening to sundry amateurs whose attempts tried him sorely. Philippa and

he had many talks, but that night she simply asked for the boat and made no remark. And as he watched her pull up stream with the long, graceful, steady sweep which was his pride, he wondered what had brought such an unusual shadow on her face. She stayed on the water for two hours, and went home drenched, to be met at the door by Anna, in a state of great excitement because Mr. Deverill had come home with Mr. Craven.

“And we’re waiting tea for you, Phil, and mother’s ever so vexed with you.”

“Tell them not to wait, and that I’ll be down in ten minutes,” replied Philippa, calmly, as she went into the kitchen to remove her dripping garments.

When she entered the sitting-room she looked her loveliest. The fresh air, the cool rain, the exertion with the oars had brought the fine rich red to her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with light. She wore her blue serge office gown, but with a white silk front—a simple costume which became her well. She did not look in the least embarrassed as she entered, apologizing to her mother for her delay.

She shook hands frankly with Mr. Deverill, coloring a little as she did so; then sat down and told them where she had been.

Mr. Deverill regarded her with admiration he made no attempt to conceal. On the faces of her parents was visible a furtive anxiety not unmixed with wonder.

All at once Philippa, whom they had regarded as a simple girl, had grown into a woman, and seemed to have drifted beyond their ken. Husband and wife exchanged glances, and there was a certain wistfulness in their eyes. Mrs. Craven put her hand under the tablecloth and patted her husband's knee—a wifely touch which said a great deal.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. DEVERILL was not at his ease, nor were Mr. and Mrs. Craven. Stansfield was at the table also; he seemed full of wonder, but finding Mr. Deverill disposed to be affable, he spoke out with some frankness of his own ambitions. He had no idea of the import or significance of the great man's visit, but it did not look like disaster. Philippa seemed quite at her ease. She and Stansfield kept the conversation from flagging. After tea Mr. Craven took Mr. Deverill to the drawing-room, and when he had remained some time there, Mrs. Craven returned for Philippa.

"Mr. Deverill would like to speak to you now, dear," said the little woman, and immediately burst into nervous tears. Philippa grew a little white, and hurried from the room. In the hall she came upon her father waiting for her; he, too, appeared very nervous and agitated.

"Your mother has told us your decision. My

dear, my dear, think well of it; it is a woman's great step in life. Remember, no one is forcing you to this, and weigh the matter well."

"I have done so, father, and I am not afraid," Philippa answered quietly, and without a tremor opened the drawing-room door. Mr. Deverill was standing before the fireplace. In that small room his presence seemed even more imposing than usual, but Philippa was not overawed by it. She thought his face kindly as well as handsome, but as she advanced into the room a curious faintness of the heart caught her, as her mother's words of the morning recurred to her mind. Yes, it was a risky experiment.

Mr. Deverill looked at her keenly, marveling much at her self-possession. Perhaps he wished it a little less marked.

"I have had a long talk with your father and mother, Miss Craven, and I am relieved and glad to hear that you do not think my offer absurd, that you are willing to regard it favorably."

"Yes," replied Philippa, simply, "I am."

They were silent a little, both standing; Philippa with her eyes on the music open on the piano. She was the first to break the silence.

"I hope we understand each other, Mr. Deverill," she began, in a low, rather faltering voice. "You do me the honor to ask me to be

your wife, because you wish a suitable companion for your daughter.”

This plea, falling so simply from the girl's lips, struck Mr. Deverill in all its absurdity.

“That is one of the reasons, Miss Craven; but there are many others. I am, and have been these many years, a lonely man. I, too, wish a companion who can share my interests in life.”

“I wonder that you have thought of me. I have had no preparation for such a life,” said Philippa, quietly.

“It needs no preparation; it is a question of sympathy and kindness of heart.”

“I will do my best,” replied Philippa. “But I am sure to make many mistakes. You will not be too hard on me, Mr. Deverill.”

“God forbid that I should be hard on you, my dear,” said Mr. Deverill, moved by her manner and her look. “I wish you to believe that I am so grateful for your acceptance of me, knowing well that youth and such attractiveness as yours looks rightly for such things as I don't possess. But I shall do my utmost to make you happy.”

“Thank you. I trust I also shall do my duty,” was the girl's quick reply. “And as we do not expect too much, and there has been no talk of affection between us, perhaps we shall live very comfortably together.”



"I HAVE HAD NO PREPARATION FOR SUCH A LIFE."

This calm summing up of the situation, putting it upon the most commonplace and prosaic level, somehow stirred a vague irritation in the mind of Mr. Deverill. She was very self-possessed, not at all agitated evidently by the unusual nature of the interview. Suddenly she changed the subject into another groove.

“You will make it easier for them here, Mr. Deverill,” she said, with a slight wistfulness, “and if possible help Stansfield to the career he most desires and is so fitted for. I shall be very grateful if you will.”

“You shall do it, my dear, when you are my wife. You will have ample means at your disposal. I have told your father what settlements I shall make.”

“Thank you; and your daughter, will she be pleased to receive me?”

“I have not yet told her. She shall not be allowed to make you unhappy, Philippa. I promise you that.”

“Oh, I was not thinking of my own happiness, but of hers. We are only quite happy, I think, when we are children, before care has any meaning for us. I hope your children will not resent my coming. Perhaps if I could see them first it might be better.”

Mr. Deverill took a turn across the floor—sure

token of perplexity. The thought of his boy and girl, rebellious, undisciplined creatures, troubled him more and more. He had seen enough in the two hours he had spent in that humble suburban home to be aware that discord was unknown; and that the family lived together in singular unity and affection. When he thought of his own daughter, whose outbursts of ungovernable temper swept the household like a withering wind, he doubted the wisdom of his decision. It was now too late to stand back, even had he wished to do so. But he did not; nay, it had now become a matter of more personal moment to him, and he felt his pulses stirring his heart—moved by a strange yearning as he looked upon the sweet, true face of his promised wife. His promised wife! and yet how far away she seemed from him, almost like a stranger. She was neither humble, grateful, nor suppliant to him, who had come in the rôle of benefactor. She evidently regarded her own gifts as equal or superior to his, which, of course, caused them to rise in his estimation. After all, the world will generally take us at our own valuation.

“You will not keep me waiting very long, Philippa,” he said, suddenly. “I hope you will marry me soon, and let me take you abroad for Christmas.”

“Christmas! that is very soon, only five weeks,” said Philippa.

“Yes; but why wait? The lady with whom my daughter now is wishes to travel herself, and would like me to take Alicia home soon. I do not wish to bring her till you are there. It will be better that the servants should be introduced to one mistress only.”

“How many servants are there?”

“Five; and my own man. But we may require more. Of course, I have lived quietly for years. They are good servants, who have been with me some time, but you can, of course, make what changes you like.”

“I am sure I shall not wish to make any. But I have had no experience in the management of servants. We have not had one since my sister and I grew up.”

“Nevertheless, I am quite sure you will make a wise and competent mistress.”

“Why do you think so?” asked Philippa, with a slight smile.

“Because you can do everything well. You are more competent than most.”

“I hope you will not find yourself mistaken in this; it is better not to expect too much,” said Philippa. “But I shall do my best.”

Silence fell upon them again, and for the first

time a strange nervous feeling oppressed the girl.

“Shall we go back to the dining-room now, Mr. Deverill?” she asked. “That is, if you have no more to say to me.”

“There is nothing more to say, at present, if you have agreed to marry me next month.”

“We must see what father and mother think. It seems very hurried.”

“But there is nothing to wait for,” he urged.

“Very well; let it be as you wish, if father and mother are willing, and I hope I shall not disappoint you.”

“That is impossible. It shall be my endeavor to see you are not disappointed,” said Mr. Deverill, warmly.

He took a step nearer to her as she turned to the door.

“Will you kiss me, my dear, as you are so soon to be my wife?”

Philippa flushed painfully, and her lips quivered.

“If you please not yet,” she said, falteringly, and with the wistfulness of a child. “Let us go back to the dining-room.”

CHAPTER VII.

It had been snowing all day. A dreary north wind swept across the sodden Essex marshes, gathering a bleaker chill as it rolled down to the sea. The snow, beautifier of most landscapes, did not much improve the dull, flat reaches of the river, as it rolled swiftly down east, past Tilbury Dock and onward to the sea. Further inland, where the ground began to undulate, and to show patches of woodland here and there, it lay soft and pure, hanging lightly on the bare boughs, clothing their nakedness with loveliness white and wonderful. Some who know Essex well have somehow in their pilgrimages managed to miss Wenleigh. It is a little off the beaten track, and only of late years became connected with a railway line. When Mr. Deverill, head of the great house of Deverill, first bought Wenleigh Manor he had to drive every morning

over four miles of open country to the junction on the Southend line. It was a remote place, and at the time of the purchase had commended itself to him for that very reason. He bought it for a purpose, and after that failed he continued to reside there because he had become attached to the place. It was a lovely spot, a quaint, old, red Elizabethan house embowered among trees, but set upon a little hill commanding a sweep of open country, and on clear days the whole breadth of the river with its many travelers, homeward and outward bound. A noble avenue led up to the imposing front, and the turf under the spreading trees was soft and green and smooth beneath the snow which now lay on it so spotlessly. A very old quaint village, which had in bygone days owned allegiance to the Squires of Wenleigh, could be seen down in the hollow, the square, ivy-covered tower of the church standing out solemnly against the sky. In the church were many tablets to the memory of the Leighs of Wenleigh—not a man, woman, or child of the old name was left.

Old residents in Wenleigh, who still cherished the memory of bygone times, shook their heads, and were a little sorrowful when the city magnate bought the manor, and professed not to be surprised at the domestic scandals which, in

spite of much precaution, found their way to the village, and became public gossip. Of late years, since the death of the beautiful, but frail mistress of Wenleigh, a silence as of the grave had settled down upon the place. The children gone, Mr. Deverill abode a solitary and miserable man, haunted by the ghosts of the past and the anxieties of the future.

The Wenleigh folks looked forward to the time when Mr. Deverill's son and daughter, having finished their education, should return to the manor and inaugurate a new era, little dreaming that their father dreaded that day and wished it far away. Suddenly his second marriage came upon them like a thunderbolt, awakening long dormant interest in the great house and its inmates.

Toward the close of that bleak January day Mr. Deverill's son and daughter were together in the drawing-room of Wenleigh Manor. It was a great room, richly decorated and handsomely furnished, though lacking somewhat in those lighter touches with which a finer taste knows how to relieve the heavy effects of too much upholstery. It had two huge fireplaces, both alight with blazing logs, and the only light in the room—the somber shadows cast by the dancing flames were not out of keeping. They

were in accord, beyond a doubt, with the feelings and attitude of these two young people, both in a bitter and rebellious frame of mind. The girl, a long willowy creature, all litheness and grace, lay upon a couch, with her arms across her head, her eyes looking hard and brilliant, her dainty red mouth set in defiant bitterness. She wore a black skirt of lace, adorned with ribbons, and a yellow silk blouse, which became her dark skin to perfection. A belt of filigree silver confined her slender waist, and her beautifully rounded wrists were adorned with many bangles. Her dark hair was arranged carelessly and was very soft and fluffy about her face; her whole appearance was striking, and she looked old for her years. In one of the windows, with his hands idly thrust into his pockets, stood her brother Wingate, his dark brows bent, his sullen mouth wearing its darkest, most sullen look. He was handsome, too; they were a pair, so far as outward appearance went, of whom any father might have been proud.

“What o’clock is it, Win?” inquired the girl, with a lazy yawn. “Isn’t it nearly tea-time? We’ll have it up at the usual time. I don’t suppose we are expected to wait for them. I’m not going to anyhow. Ring the bell.”

“Ring it yourself,” he replied, rudely. “That is, if you think you’d better. It’s your last shot anyhow, so you’d better take advantage of it.” The girl’s red, full lip curled slightly, and she tossed her book on the floor.

“My last shot is it? Well, we’ll see. I’ve not suffered martyrdom with that old Cambridge cat for three years to be set aside like this. I’m going to do exactly as I like, and have a good time too, as Mrs. Martin Deverill will presently see.”

“It’ll be rather interesting, watching the fray; the Kilkenny cats are nothing to it,” said Wingate, lazily. “*I* don’t mind it now I come to think of it, and Hawes says she’s awfully good-looking.”

“Oh, I know the style; there’s two things she can be—either cheeky and upsetting, or shy and overwhelmed with everything, as those sort of people usually are when introduced into a sphere above them. I flatter myself I know how to deal with them both. I mean to be mistress of the situation, Win.”

Wingate Deverill turned round and regarded his sister with a species of lazy admiration.

“You speak like seventy instead of seventeen, Alicia, ’pon my word you do: and I don’t envy Mrs. D. She won’t lie on a bed of roses.”

“She doesn’t deserve to, having usurped my place so shamefully,” said Alicia. “But I’ll lead her a dance, see if I don’t, and papa, too, he deserves to be punished for the sneaking way he has behaved; too cowardly to tell us, but sending Hawes down. I’ll let him see what I think of his conduct, see if I don’t.”

It was not a dutiful speech, but Mr. Deverill had long since ceased to expect dutiful conduct in the children whom his frail wife had left as a legacy. In his treatment of them he had somehow missed the way, and had failed to inspire them either with respect or affection for him. Although a man of commanding genius in business, he could not cope with the simplest domestic problem, and this problem, the welfare and the future of his children, was by no means simple. It was because he felt himself unable to cope with it that he had made up his mind to marry again. Although his first matrimonial experiment had been a disastrous failure, he had retained his faith in womanhood, believing its influence boundless for good as for evil.

“So the programme is mapped out,” said Wingate, as he took a cigarette from his pocket and struck a match. “And we are mutually condemned—I to an office-stool at Cornhill, you to domestic duties and the sewing of flannel petti-

coats for the ungrateful Wenleightes; a charming prospect, truly, Alicia, eh?"

"That's your last cigarette in the drawing-room, I know," she said, with a slight inscrutable smile, and, rising languidly to her feet, she gave the bell a tremendous peal. She was very tall, and her gown swept the floor, thus giving added height and slenderness to her figure. No one looking at Alicia Deverill could believe she was but seventeen; she had all the self-possession of seven-and-twenty, and nothing girlish in her look or manner.

The parlor-maid, looking a trifle surprised, entered the room with a lighted taper in her hand.

"We don't want lights, Wilson," said the young lady, imperiously; "bring tea up at once, it's nearly five."

"Please, miss, we thought you'd wait. The carriage has gone to the station, and will be here at five."

"What has that to do with us? Bring tea at once, and tell Box I am very angry because it is late. You can light up now you are here."

The parlor-maid did so; and her face wore no pleasant look. Alicia Deverill has only been at home three days, but in that time has made herself so obnoxious to the servants that had the

new mistress not been expected they would have given notice.

When the lamps were lighted Alicia opened the piano and began to play a noisy waltz, with a carefulness of execution and a certain touch which betrayed a correct musical taste.

It drowned the voice of the moaning wind and the roll of carriage-wheels on the graveled approach. Both were surprised when the door opened suddenly and their father with his new wife entered the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE music came to a sudden stop, and Alicia sprang to her feet, and stood with her hand on the lid of the piano, her face turned to the door, flushed and defiant, her graceful head thrown back—a picture indeed. Wingate leaned up against a cabinet with his smoldering cigarette in one hand and the other thrust into his pocket. Mr. Deverill and his wife entered together; he looking distinctly anxious, she entirely self-possessed and unconscious. Alicia never looked at her father in that supreme moment, her eyes being fixed on the figure by his side.

As she took in every detail of the slight, lady-like figure in its exquisite attire, the unperturbed face with its sweetness and strength, the air of ladyhood, her heart sank—for there was quiet power and capability in all—and Alicia felt that her boasting had been premature.

"These are my children, Philippa," said Mr. Deverill. "Alicia, come and speak to my wife."

Alicia took no notice whatever; then Wingate, ashamed, tossed his cigarette in the fire, and advanced to his father's wife.

"How do you do? Beastly cold, isn't it?" he said, in his characteristic style. "But here's tea coming; that'll warm you. How are you, dad?"

If the greeting were a trifle brusque, it was kindly, and took the edge off Alicia's insulting silence. Philippa smiled brightly and laid her hand in Wingate's, lifting her clear eyes frankly to his face.

"Thank you," she said, and turned to say a word to Alicia, but Alicia had fled.

"Don't mind it, Philippa; she is only a child," whispered Mr. Deverill, nervously.

Wingate saw Philippa smile back at him as she answered, calmly:

"I don't mind it in the least; she will talk to me by-and-by, I hope. I suppose I had better pour out tea."

She took off her gloves, revealing to Wingate's keenly observant eye white, well-shaped hands, the right bare, the other adorned by the wedding ring and one solitaire of the finest water. She sat down at the table as to the manner born, and looked again at Wingate. The sullenness had dis-

appeared from his face, leaving in its place an expression of the liveliest interest.

“Now come and tell me how you like your tea, Wingate? have you a sweet tooth like your father?”

Mr. Deverill's man entered the room with a note, and took one long, keen glance at the new mistress whose arrival had been variously anticipated for some days. As he turned to go, his master, who knew his face well, observed a distinct expression of satisfaction, almost amounting to relief, on it, and that simple fact caused his spirits to rise. The approval of Hawes meant a great deal.

“You got my letter, I suppose, this morning, Wingate?” said Mr. Deverill to his son.

“Yes, Alicia did; she'll be all right soon. Did you have a cold journey down?”

“Very; the house looks warm and comfortable, doesn't it, Philippa?”

“It is the loveliest house I have ever been in,” replied Philippa, with ready appreciation, which pleased her husband well. “And I am so hungry, I am going to have a very good tea, which I hope you will share.”

It was a natural and happy diversion which relieved the tension. Wingate, to his own surprise as well as his father's, presently found him-

self rendering assistance to his father's young wife, and being rewarded by many grateful glances of those soft, dark, penetrating eyes.

So the ordeal of introduction, so far as Wingate was concerned, passed off most successfully.

Philippa had now been the wife of Mr. Deverill for three weeks, which time they had spent in the Riviera, and her face certainly looked less careworn and anxious than that misty morning when she had stood before the altar of the little Clapton Church and had taken her solemn vows upon her. She looked bright and at her ease. It was characteristic of her not to be downcast about Alicia's reception, for which, indeed, she had prepared herself.

"I had no idea that you had such a fine place, Martin," she said, as she went upstairs by-and-by to her dressing-room. "Shall I be able to manage this great house? There is a great deal I shall have to set myself to learn."

Mr. Deverill smiled.

"It will be child's play to you, Philippa," he said. "That does not concern me at all."

He followed her into the room and stood watching her as she took off her hat, his face wearing a curious expression, admiration for his wife being, however, plainly discernible. He had during these sunny weeks in the south come nearer

being utterly happy than he had ever been in his life. There was none of the passion, nor the absolute dependence on each other of those who marry for love, neither had there been any pretense to it. They had entered upon their married life soberly, each with a purpose in view, and neither yet looked as if they had found it a matter for regret.

“I need scarcely apologize for Alicia, my dear. I prepared you for it.”

“You did; don’t worry about it. I shall try to win her, poor little sore heart. And she is a most lovely creature, Martin; you did not tell me that.”

“I wish she were less attractive; she looks so exactly like what her mother was when I married her that I am consumed with anxiety. I am trusting to you to discover the bent of her mind and to foster its better impulses. All the same, I shall talk very seriously to her about her conduct to-night.”

Philippa bent over her open trunk a moment in silence. Presently, however, she looked at her husband, and there was a soft, beautiful flush on her cheek.

“If you are trusting so much to me where your daughter is concerned, will you leave her entirely to me, and let me begin to-night? I can under-

stand so well how she feels. We must be very gentle with her just now."

"But she was so rude to you, Philippa. It would not be right to pass it over."

"I can survive that, and a great deal more, and Wingate made up for it. He was quite pleasant. Promise to leave Alicia entirely to me. Remember she is part of my experiment."

"What experiment?" he asked, with a touch of coldness.

Philippa bit her lip.

"I ought not to have let that slip; but you know we agreed that there should be no misunderstanding between us. When mother talked to me about my marriage, pointing out its difficulties, I said it would be an experiment. I have always wanted a career; and human beings are a great deal more interesting than typewriting machines."

"Then I am part of the experiment, too, I suppose?" he said, with a slight smile which hid a felt disappointment.

Philippa laughed a trifle nervously.

"Well, yes; if you put it so, I suppose you are. But, then, I am only part of your experiment where your children are concerned. We did understand each other, didn't we?"

"I suppose we did; you are matter-of-fact, Philippa."

"It is better to be matter-of-fact than hypocritical, surely," she answered, quickly. "You give me certain things, which mean a great deal to me and to those I love. In return I do my utmost for you. I shall try to make your home happy and comfortable, Martin. I hope you will believe that, for indeed, I am very grateful to you. You have given me so much."

"Hush!" He raised his hand peremptorily to still her expressions of gratitude, which somehow fell distastefully on his ears.

"Those you love," he repeated. "There is a gulf fixed, Philippa. They and we stand on a different plane."

Philippa flushed painfully, and as she turned to her unpacked trunk again her eyes were full of tears

CHAPTER IX.

ALICIA did not come down to dinner. Nobody commented on her absence. Mr. Deverill was pleased to see that Wingate had made a careful toilet, and even felt a little grateful to him for his courtesy. There was pathos in that. Mr. Deverill was a great man and a stern man in the city; at home quite the reverse. We sometimes see such contrasts in the same character, and it is always an interesting study. No one meeting Mr. Deverill in the ordinary way of business would have believed him to be at heart sensitive and shrinking; nevertheless these were attributes of the inner man.

When dinner was over, Mr. Deverill and his son remained for a little at table. Philippa went alone to the drawing-room, where Wilson brought her a cup of coffee.

“Has Miss Deverill dined, do you know?” she

inquired, looking at the girl steadily. Wilson flushed a trifle confusedly, but answered at once.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“In her own room?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Where, then?”

“In the kitchen, ma’am. She has been down all the time dinner was being served, and had something as each course came down.”

Philippa restrained her desire to laugh outright.

“Where is she now?”

“In her own room.”

“Is Miss Deverill’s room on the same floor as mine?”

“No, ma’am, higher up, next to the old school-room. Can I show it you?”

“Not just now, thank you. Put a fire in my dressing-room, and when you have time take out my dresses, if you please.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Her mistress said no more, but the girl still lingered, till Philippa looked up at her with a pleasant, inquiring smile.

“Please, ma’am, excuse me, but we are glad to see you here, and I trust will be able to suit you. We’ve been here a good while, most of us, and we like the master well.”

“If you have been able to please him, you will

suit me," said Philippa, gently. "Thank you, Wilson, I hope we shall all be good friends."

These few kindly words, and the manner of their utterance, bound the girl's heart to her from that moment.

"She no lady, indeed!" was her comment in the kitchen; "she's a real lady every inch of her. Knows her place and ours, but got a heart. Poor dear thing, I'm sorry for her, that I am."

Philippa meditatively sipped her coffee, and then set down her empty cup. After taking a little restless turn through the spacious but pleasant, comfortable room, she went out to the landing, and began slowly to mount the stairs. She could hear the voices in the dining-room, and made haste to get out of sight lest Mr. Deverill should call her down.

As she went up she took note of the rich, soft carpets, the fine engravings, and the statuary on the staircase, and sighed a little to think of the money that had been expended on one house, while so many in the world suffered from sordid care. It was a natural thought in one who had never known the luxury of spending a penny on her own amusement or pleasure, and it was not accompanied by any elation because all upon which her eyes now dwelt belonged to her. Her nature was singularly adaptive; Mr. Deverill

had wondered often at her self-possession, and in the grand continental hotels where their honeymoon had been spent, she accepted everything as a matter of course. Graver subjects than her new possessions, beautiful though they were, occupied her as she sought for Alicia's room. She had a duty to fulfill—to be kind and useful to her husband's daughter was part of her contract. She could not rest until she had made a beginning. She looked into the old school-room first—a large, pleasant room, somewhat shabby, it is true, but looking comfortable and homelike. Then she knocked at Alicia's room. Receiving no answer, she opened the door and entered, closing it again behind her. Her heart beat a little as she saw the girl's figure reclining in a big, wide basket-chair, with her feet on the fender.

“Is that my coffee, Wilson? Take it down again, and bring tea. I had some in the afternoon, and I feel like it now, and some muffins hot, toasted, and crisp. Are they done dinner?”

She turned her head, and instead of Wilson with the tray there stood her father's wife in an evening gown of soft, black satin, looking so strikingly sweet that Alicia was startled.

A dark flush sprang to her olive cheek, and she gave her feet an impatient stamp.

“What do you want, Mrs. Deverill? This is my room, where I come to be alone. I will not interfere with you, but please to understand that in this corner of the house I will have no intruders.”

The words were rude, the manner more so, but Philippa did not flinch.

“I have come to have a little talk with you, Alicia; the sooner we get it over the better.”

“I won’t talk to you,” cried the girl, rebelliously. “I hate you, and I think it perfectly disgraceful of you to have inveigled papa into a marriage so unsuitable. Why, you don’t look any older than me.”

“I am four-and-twenty,” replied Philippa, quietly. “We will leave discussion of my marriage out of the question, if you please, Alicia, and—”

“Do not call me Alicia; I am Miss Deverill to strangers.”

“Well, Miss Deverill, then,” said Philippa, with a little smile. She advanced to the fireplace, and stood there with her bare, rounded arm resting on the mantel, and looked down on the girl who had again thrown herself in her chair and opened her book. The title Philippa could read, “Glimpses of the Stage.”

“Do you want to know what I’m reading?”

You may look at it if you like. I'm learning what I can from it before I begin my career. I mean to have a career like mamma."

"God forbid!" fell involuntarily from Philippa's lips, the facts of that wasted and melancholy life, as related to her by her husband, being still fresh in her mind.

"Why do you say, 'God forbid'?" inquired Alicia, with a faintly mocking smile, which changed her girlish look to that of a woman of the world. "Mamma had a very jolly time of it till she married papa. Why, half the aristocracy were in love with her; such presents she had and such gayety—water-parties on the river, drives to Richmond on Sunday, and then the theater at night—that's life, if you like. I should have killed myself long ago if I had not had that to look forward to."

Philippa looked, as she felt, inexpressibly shocked. To hear such views of life from the lips of a mere girl seemed terrible, and it came home to Philippa in a moment that she had had no idea of the magnitude of the task she had undertaken. This bright, exquisite creature, old before her time, steeped to the lips in worldly wisdom before she was out of her teens, the victim of a thousand inherited tendencies to waywardness, perhaps even to sin, presented a prob-



"I AM MISS DEVERILL TO STRANGERS."

lem requiring patience, loving-kindness, rare wisdom, to deal with.

Well might Philippa ask herself whether she possessed any of the qualities required, whether she could even hope to influence a being already so matured in judgment, so positive in her opinion, so self-reliant and composed.

“The greatest folly of mamma’s life was her marriage, and I don’t blame her for going back to the stage. Why, life here would kill anybody. If I did not hate you so much, I should be sorry for you.”

She looked straight at Philippa, but her smile provoked none on the elder girl’s grave lips.

“Does your father know of your ambition?” she inquired, pointing to the book.

“If he doesn’t, he soon will. Wingate knows; not a bad old chap is Wingate, only a bit soft—wants to see life, I guess, only he hasn’t any pluck. How horrified you look, Mrs. Deverill. I said I wouldn’t talk to you, and I have done it all the same. While I’m at it I may as well say all I’ve got to say. Perhaps if we agree to leave each other alone we needn’t fight like the Kilkenny cats, as Win said we should. Let’s make a bargain, if you like. You don’t interfere with me, and I won’t with you. You’re not my sort, of course; I never expected you would be; but

you look rather kind. Are you going to leave me alone, or are you not?"

"I'm not!"

Alicia looked momentarily surprised and taken aback. She had not expected such a promptly decisive reply.

"Oh, you'll not. Well, then, get out of here."

"No," answered Philippa, calmly, "I won't."

She stooped down, and before Alicia could prevent her, kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER X.

THAT night Philippa could not sleep. She felt strangely excited, as was to be expected, having gone through so much. Alicia chiefly occupied her thoughts. She could not get the girl's brilliant beauty, her wild eyes, and above all her words, out of her mind. They haunted her even in her dreams. No one could say Alicia Deverill was uninteresting or commonplace. The interest she had awakened in Philippa's mind was of the painful kind, however, tinged with anxiety and dread. There was not much chance of a placid or monotonous existence in the vicinity of Mr. Deverill's daughter; and if Philippa had longed for a sphere in life, she had now obtained one likely to be varied by many surprises, in which the unexpected was the likeliest to happen always. It was a great change for the girl reared in the happy, placid suburban

home, with its narrow outlook, its utter absence of event. As yet Mr. Deverill's children, whom she had taken in charge, were more interesting to Mr. Deverill's wife than himself.

"You look very worried, my dear," he observed as she was dressing next morning. "Don't let Alicia worry you. I told you she should not be allowed to do so. If there is a repetition of last night's scene I shall make some other arrangement."

"I am worried about her, but not in the way you think," Philippa replied. "Promise me that you will say nothing to her. In her present mood harsh words would only harden. Won't you leave her to me?"

Mr. Deverill looked distinctly relieved.

"Very gladly, my dear, if you think it best, but I will not have you vexed or unhappy, remember that."

Philippa faintly smiled, and glanced through the window upon the wintry landscape, watching a robin, bright-eyed and scarlet-breasted, hopping on the whitened boughs of a holly tree: she thought, what she did not say, that perhaps Alicia might have been less difficult to deal with now had she had different guidance in her earlier years. Dreading the development of a wayward nature, Mr. Deverill had committed the

mistake of placing her under the stern control of a kinswoman of his own—a hard, narrow, unsympathetic person, whose idea of child-rearing was to keep the child in a state of complete subjection. She had exacted an outward semblance of submission from Alicia, and had boasted of her success, not dreaming that she had only stemmed the torrent, and forcing it back to the depths, left it there, a seething whirlpool ready to overflow at any moment. Alicia came down to breakfast, and though civil was very quiet. At nine o'clock the brougham came round to the door and took Mr. Deverill and Wingate to the station. Philippa and Alicia were left with a whole, long day before them to improve each other's acquaintance.

Philippa stood at the breakfast-room window till the brougham was out of sight, then she turned cheerfully to Alicia, who was toasting her toes at the fire.

“Now we have to amuse each other. Will you show me over the house, Alicia, and then take a walk with me to the village?”

Alicia yawned and threw her arms above her head.

“I can show you round the house, if you like now; but I can't go for a walk with you, because I am going to Southend.”

“To Southend,” repeated Philippa. “Do you go by train?”

“No, I’ll drive the cart, and I’m going to start at eleven.”

“Won’t you take me, Alicia?”

“Not to-day.”

She refused quite coolly, and without a word of apology or explanation.

Philippa looked rather put out. “How far is it?”

“Five miles and a half.”

“That is a long drive, and it is bitterly cold. Have you anything particular to do? Couldn’t you send one of the men?”

“No.”

Nothing could be more unpromising than Alicia’s monosyllabic answers.

“Did your father know you were going?”

“No. If you’ve done asking questions, Mrs. Deverill, I’ll show you the house,” said Alicia, as she languidly rose. She wore a very neat gown of red serge, admirably becoming to her dark beauty; her hair was very fantastically dressed in a style too old for her. But it was Alicia’s aim and desire, at present, to look older than her years.

“Then you are not going to be friendly with me, Alicia?”

“Friendly enough, as I told you last night, if you let me alone. But if you’re going to spy on me it’ll be war to the knife. I’ll go where I like, as I have always done here, and the cart’s mine; papa gave it me on my last birthday. If you want to drive out there’s the carriage and a dog-cart, too; and you are the mistress here now. I won’t forget it.”

Alicia spoke calmly and deliberately, and though her words were distinctly rude, her manner was not offensive. Philippa perceived that she was trying to make their relative positions clear, and though she felt a little soreness of heart, accepted the situation with great good-humor. It was the best—nay, the only course to pursue in the circumstances.

“My mother and my little sister Lucy are coming down this afternoon, Alicia, in time for lunch. Will you be here?”

“No. So you have a mother? Is she nice?”

Philippa’s eyes suddenly overflowed, and she made no other answer.

“Look here, if you were so fond of them all why did you marry my father? You won’t have a good time with him. My mother never had. He thinks women should stay at home and see nothing; but perhaps you like that sort of thing?”

“I don’t, but I think you know very little of your father. We saw a great deal abroad.”

“But what do you call seeing things? In Paris did you go to all those dear little cafés chantants on the Champs Elysées, and did he take you to Monte Carlo, and let you stake a good bit? Mamma used to tell me all about all these things, and I mean to see them for myself some day.”

“How old were you when your mother died?”

“I was twelve, but she was away from here. She died in London. I saw her there sometimes, but papa did not know. I have a grudge against him. He took mamma away from everything that made life worth living, and shut her up in this jail; then when she rebelled and went back to those who loved her and were kind to her, he forbade her name to be mentioned here.”

Philippa remained silent. It was an extremely delicate and painful theme, and to hear it so coolly discussed by such a young girl gave her something of a shock.

“When I marry it won’t be an old man with horrid big children like Win and me,” was her next delightful remark. “I’ll better my condition or I won’t change it.”

“You are too young to be talking and thinking

of such things, Alicia," said Philippa, with a sigh.

"Do you think so? Well, you see it's a matter of opinion. But marriage will be my last resource. I've got some other irons in the fire first. We'll see; we needn't go on talking here all the morning. If you want to see the house, let's go."

The next hour was not unpleasant to Philippa; for, having had it out with her step-mother, Alicia was very affable and condescended to talk a good deal. There was something very attractive about the girl, a fascination in the changing beauty of her eyes and in her constantly varying mood which Philippa felt.

"You're not half a bad sort, and I'd ask you to go with me to Southend this morning if I could; we can go another day," she said, when they came in at half-past ten from a tour of inspection outside. "Now I must get ready."

Philippa debated in her mind whether she should inquire what was Alicia's business in Southend, but she decided to say nothing—in the circumstances a wise decision.

She stood at the door and watched the girl drive away in her smart little pony cart, the very picture of youth and beauty; and somehow

as she returned to the house there was a little ache at her heart.

But within the next hour that was forgotten in the joy of welcoming to her beautiful new home the dear mother and little sister from the old home, which now seemed so far off and unreal that it might have happened only in a dream.

CHAPTER XI.

VERY smartly did the little Norwegian pony trot into Southend. The road from Leigh ran parallel with the sea, and from its higher levels Alicia could catch a glimpse of the gray waters sullenly seething under the lowering sky; but she regarded the prospect with but a languid interest. Her brows were knit, her face troubled, and occasionally a vague irritation found vent in the use of the whip, which sent the Norwegian off at a gallop. The crisp air, frost laden, made the color deepen in the girl's face; hers was the beauty in which richness of color plays a prominent part.

As she neared the town the air became less biting, though it lost a little of its freshness. The streets of Southend on a raw January morning do not present a very lively picture, and Alicia in her smart cart excited some attention as she rattled down the High Street to the Royal Hotel,

where she gave her turnout to a groom, and entered the house.

“Can I see Madame Tressider?” she asked the sleepy-looking waiter in the hall.

“I’ll inquire, miss; but she doesn’t rise early; it’s only noon now.”

“She expects me. Please say Miss Deverill has come.”

The waiter asked her to walk into the coffee-room, and there she was left to warm her chilled fingers by the cheerful fire for quite ten minutes.

“Mrs. Tressider can see you now, miss,” said the man, coming back, and had Alicia been less absorbed, or had she possessed more knowledge of the world, she might have detected a shade of disrespect in his manner. But the girl was totally unconscious of it, and she followed him upstairs with a heart beating rather fast, for was not that morning’s interview to decide her future—in a word, her career, of which she so often thought and sometimes proudly spoke, was about to begin. Any person with a moderate sense of the fitness of things would have seen little in the appearance of Madame Tressider to augur this brilliant future of which Alicia dreamed. She was a large, fat, comfortable-looking person, attired in an ample dressing-gown of a somewhat startling hue and style; her hair, bright

golden and elaborately frizzed, served to show up the ravages time and poor health had made in a face of which the gilded youth of London had been wont to rave.

“Come and kiss me, child,” she said with languid interest, as Alicia entered the room. “Mon Dieu! how like the little one grows to her mother. I see the likeness more and more.”

Madame was not French, but she had been reared in a convent school at Dinan, and still affected at times the French idiom, which Alicia thought charming and distinguished.

Alicia advanced a little timidly and gave the required kiss, a trifle reluctantly it is true, for the girl was even then true to her better instincts, which often whispered doubts of Madame's sincerity and goodness.

“What a color you have! it will make your fortune! Poor Nina never had it even in her best days; but come, tell me how goes it in the great manor house where my niece was shut up. Has the new wife come?”

“Yes, last night, Madame,” replied Alicia, and volunteered no further information, for the grave, sweet, true face of her father's wife seemed to rise before her with a vague reproach.

“Well, little one, what more? Tell me of the inevitable scene, which I shall so much enjoy.

Did you keep your place, and make the *parvenue* to shrink?"

"She is not a *parvenue*, Madame. She is a lady, and a good woman."

"Young?"

"Yes; four-and-twenty."

"Fine-looking?"

"I think so."

Madame gave her shoulders an expressive shrug, and took a sip from a little liqueur glass on the table.

"Ah, Mr. Deverill has luck to marry two fine women. He must have some fascinating qualities you and I have not yet discovered. But, of course, he is rich. Well, and there is to be war?"

"No, I don't think so. Mrs. Deverill is too much of a lady to fight, Madame. She will simply put me in my place and keep me there."

How Philippa, nursing her secret awe of the high-spirited, wayward girl would have stared at these words.

"Which the little one will not relish, eh?" said Madame, smacking her lips over her liqueur. "I sympathize with her, it is too hard; but there is a way out."

"Yes, Madame." Alicia glanced a trifle wistfully round the room.

"Mr. Tressider is not here. I hoped to see

him, that he would try my voice this morning."

"He is not here. He and Victor came to see me on Sunday, but returned to town the same night; I go to-morrow."

Alicia looked disappointed.

"Then nothing can be settled," she said, rather despondently.

"Everything is settled, if the little one agrees," said Madame, cheerfully. "If she is not comfortable in the great manor house, let her come to us. It is a simple ménage, but she will be welcome to it for poor Nina's sake."

Alicia's face flushed.

"Do you really mean it, Madame?"

Madame nodded and smoothed the wrinkled folds of the dressing-gown with her large fair hands.

"Then Tressider can try your voice, love, and give the necessary training as he has time."

Alicia's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, how delightful! But will you do this for nothing? Papa is rich, but I have no money. You know that I cannot pay anything."

"Not presently, but by-and-by, when you become famed as was your poor little mother, you will not forget those humble friends who did what they could."

"You need not say humble, Madame, when Mr. Tressider is a gentleman of so great position and influence. He can take whom he will on at the theater, and do just as he likes. He is not at all humble."

"Ah, well, his position he has earned. He has some influence, it is true, and he uses it so unselfishly that we are poor, poor always. I cannot even have the dresses I want. Well, then, when will you come?"

"Am I to tell papa?"

Madame gave her shoulders an expressive shrug.

"The little one can please herself, but do not let her forget his treatment of poor Nina."

"Do you mean, then, that I am to steal away from home?"

Again Madame shrugged her shoulders, and gave a slightly indifferent laugh.

"I suggest, I mean nothing, I simply say come when and how you please. But if you come, child, remember there must be no going back. It is a hard profession, offering prizes only to those who earn them."

"I am not afraid of work. Then I will come, Madame, any day I can get away."

Madame, with a nod, dismissed the subject. It was a matter of interest and moment to her,

but it was part of her policy to show the girl that she was simply indifferent. She changed the subject, but kept the talk skillfully in the groove likely to excite the girl's imagination, and desire for excitement and praise. She made certain allusions to the brilliant successes to be attained on the Variety stage, and showed the best side of the life, keeping the more sordid and dark side in the background. When Alicia left the hotel her brain was in a whirl, and it was well that she had a five mile drive through thinly falling snow, which helped to cool her down before she reached home. Lunch was over, and Mrs. Deverill was with her guests in the drawing-room, but Alicia did not disturb them. She prowled down to the kitchen, got something to eat, and then retired to her own room to indulge in dreams of the brilliant future in store for her. When the tea-bell rang she went downstairs. Philippa glanced at her a trifle nervously as she entered the room, by no means certain what her demeanor would be.

"Mother, this is Alicia," she said, gently; "I hope you had a nice drive, dear, and did not feel the cold too much."

"No, no, thank you; how do you do?" said Alicia, rather nervously, avoiding the sweet, motherly eyes of Mrs. Craven, as they sought

her face. Then the little Lucy, a baby still, in spite of her years, came to her and stole her little hand in hers.

“I like you, you are so pretty. Kiss me, please.”

Alicia caught her up and held her cheek to hers. Philippa's tears rose, and Mrs. Craven, nodding complacently to herself, asked for another cup of tea.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. CRAVEN and Lucy were to remain all night; it was a delightful surprise when the brougham brought back from the station Mr. Craven as well as Mr. Deverill. The great man did nothing meanly or partially. He had married the daughter of the oldest clerk in his employment, and he was not ashamed of the connection. Philippa's face flushed with pleasure when her father entered, and she cast a quick, grateful glance at her husband that warmed his heart.

"Well, my dear," he said, very kindly, "I hope you have not had a dull day."

"Oh, no! Alicia was very kind, showing me about before she went to Southend, and then mother came. It was very kind of you to bring father down."

Mr. Deverill laid his hand on her shoulder and turned her round to him. She had dressed to

please him in a black velvet gown cut squarely at the neck—a dress he had always admired. She looked very fair and young in it now, with that touch of nervous wistfulness in her look. She was only feeling her way, and a good deal devolved on her.

“My dear,” he said, very gently, “why will you thank me for every trivial thing—for such things as are yours by right? Did you expect me to cut you off from your own people?”

“Some of them—Stansfield and Anna—and perhaps mother—feared it a little. I did not.”

“I promised to make you happy if I could; that would be a poor beginning,” he said, and his voice was almost caressing in its tone. The dressing-room door was open, and Alicia, on her way to the drawing-room, saw her father’s attitude and the unusual kindness of his demeanor; and somehow it made her feel as if the house now held for her no place.

“And what did Alicia go to Southend for?” she heard him ask. And she paused on the stairs unconsciously for the answer.

“She did not tell me.”

“Did she drive?”

“Yes, her own trap.”

“This is the second time in a week she has been. I must ask her,” said Mr. Deverill, and

his daughter imagined a new harshness in his tone. She waited no longer, however, but went down to the drawing-room with a cloud on her brow, which even little Lucy's loving ways could not dispel. But in spite of Alicia's quietness of manner, the dinner passed off well. Mr. Deverill exerted himself to please. Needless to say, he could talk well, and on a great variety of subjects. It surprised him much to find in Craven a match for him. Reginald Craven had a refined and a cultivated mind; and when animated was an agreeable companion. Mr. Deverill wondered greatly that one so eminently companionable should have been a comparative stranger to him all these years. He grew more and more affable, confidential even, over the bottle of choice Madeira placed on the table by Hawes at his master's order.

Alicia did not go to the drawing-room, but, saying she was tired, went back to her own room.

Next morning her father and she met on the stairs going down to breakfast.

"Good - morning, Alicia. So you were at Southend again yesterday. Do you know anybody there?"

"Yes," replied Alicia, briefly.

"Whom, may I ask?"

Alicia made no reply.

“I am waiting, my dear, for your answer.”

Alicia moved on speechless. Her father looked much annoyed; but Alicia passed on, silent and defiant, to the dining-room.

At breakfast, of course, the conversation was general, though Alicia took no part in it. Her father only spoke to her once before leaving, and it was only to say pointedly and harshly:

“I shall expect some explanation when I return, Alicia; pray remember that.”

His very anxiety over the child made him seem harsh and stern even when he did not feel so. Alicia resented it keenly; Philippa was grieved to see the expression in her face. Mr. and Mrs. Craven returned to town together, leaving the little Lucy behind.

“I now feel quite satisfied about you, dear,” said Mrs. Craven, as she put on her bonnet. “You have a lovely home, a kind husband, and many blessings. I trust, Philippa, you are not disappointed.”

“I am quite happy, mother. Mr. Deverill is so good; so considerate always. I am only anxious about Alicia. There is something there I do not understand, and I wish I did!”

“It will come in time, dear; the girl is not hostile to you, anybody can see that; the rest

will come in time. And oh, my dear, what a burden has been rolled from my heart."

Had Philippa's sacrifice been ten times harder, these words and the look of peace on her mother's worn face would have repaid her. Yes, she had done wisely, she told herself again and again, yet there was something missing from her life, she could not tell what. Again she and Alicia were left to amuse each other, and directly they were left Philippa spoke.

"I thought your father seemed vexed with you this morning."

"He was as cross as two sticks; but he will get over it," replied Alicia, serenely.

"What was it about?"

"Because I did not choose to tell him what I was doing in Southend yesterday."

"Surely he has the right to know," Philippa ventured to say.

"What right? He has never taken any interest in me," said Alicia, hotly. "He has never taught us to give him our confidence. He is a stranger to us, and now he expects too much. I will not be treated as a child. I am not one, and he must know it. I have never had any childhood like other children. Why, I never felt like that little Lucy of yours in my life. Mamma's troubles weighed on me from my baby-

hood. She used to tell me everything. Perhaps she did wrong, I don't know; but nobody helped her to do right. Papa was her jailer and her judge; he shall not be mine."

She spoke with a passion most unusual in so young a girl; it moved Philippa very much. She felt that there was a good deal of truth even in those passionate words.

Mr. Deverill had seriously erred in the rearing of his children, and now expected impossible results.

"Believe me, dear, there is another side to your father's nature," she said, gently. "I—"

"Oh, I know! He shows it to you. I have seen it; but he has no affection for me. I shall be glad if he is kinder to you than he has ever been to us. You can remember, whatever happens in the future, that, after the first, I did not feel bitter against you; I even like you, because you are so straight and true, and you haven't got any airs. I wish I'd known you sooner."


Philippa had still that strong feeling of something behind, something she could not reach, and therefore could not understand.

"I am very glad you like me, because you see we must be a great deal together. I am going up on Friday to spend the day with mother; will you come with me?"

“On Friday. Shall you be gone all day?” asked Alicia, with a quick, reddening blush.

“Yes, I shall go up with Mr. Deverill in the morning, and return by the same train at night.”

“Perhaps I will. I’ll see,” said Alicia; but shortly afterward she went upstairs and wrote a letter which she carried herself to the post-office at Wenleigh. It was addressed to Madame Tres-sider, at Fitzroy Square, London.



CHAPTER XIII.

ON Friday morning Alicia did not come down to breakfast, and when Philippa, dressed for her early journey, went to her room, she complained of a severe headache. She certainly did not look particularly well, but when Philippa offered to remain at home with her she violently demurred.

“No, I’ll just lie quietly a bit, and then get up. Don’t worry. I hope you’ll have a pleasant day. How nice you look in that sealskin coat! Please kiss me.”

It was the first time Alicia had asked it, and her face wore such an unusually sweet, child-like look that Philippa kissed it a good many times, and when she felt the girl cling to her a thrill went to her heart.

In one short week how strong a hold she had got on the wayward heart! It augured well for the happiness of the future. In that moment

a bright vision crossed the girl's faithful heart; she saw peace, unity, love, reigning in Wenleigh Manor wooed thither by her alone.

"Perhaps I shall come down earlier. I shall be thinking of you here all by yourself."

"No, no; don't spoil your day for me. I am not worth any sacrifice. But I might have been different if I had known you sooner. Aunt Catherine with whom I lived is such an awful hypocrite. I thought most good people would be like her."

Philippa smiled.

"You are going to forget all about Aunt Catherine, and on Monday you and I must see what we can study together. I like languages and music; then you must teach me to drive."

"You'd better go now. Papa is always so cross if he has to wait a minute. Good-by. You don't quite hate me?"

"I am learning to love you very fast, Alicia."

"I shall never forget you, nor forgive myself for being so abominable to you when you came. But I was not altogether to blame, remember that."

Philippa laughed, gave her another kiss, and ran down to her husband, who was waiting with astonishing patience in the hall. The gentle, happy-hearted girl was teaching others besides

Alicia, her unconscious influence bearing its daily fruit.

“What’s the matter with Alicia?” Mr. Deverill asked, as he helped her into the carriage.

“A headache. She looks rather tired. I think we shall be very happy together. I feel quite glad and hopeful to-day. But aren’t you going to wait for Wingate?”

“He’s walking, my dear, and will be at the station before us. It is not a mile across the fields. So you are glad and hopeful to-day, are you, my dear? It makes me glad and hopeful to hear it.”

She turned round to him, and her sweet face wore its sweetest look.

“Don’t be angry with me, if I seem to interfere, but I wish you would be more gentle with Alicia. She will not be driven; she has lived so long among unpleasant people that she has become quite soured. She seems surprised and grateful when one is kind to her. Promise me you will be very gentle with her, as gentle as you are to me. You will find her as grateful, perhaps more so.”

Again Mr. Deverill gave his head a deprecating shake.

“Why will you so constantly speak of gratitude?” he asked, with a slight frown.

“Because I am grateful, and I cannot help saying so,” she said, smilingly. “But you have given me no promise about Alicia. She has had such a dull life for a young, bright girl. The lady with whom she has been staying, Aunt Catherine, cannot be a very pleasant person.”

“My cousin, Mrs. Wordsley, is considered a very good woman,” said Mr. Deverill.

“Some good people are not pleasant,” Philippa answered, readily.

“Well, I cannot say she is as pleasant as you, my dear, or your mother,” admitted Mr. Deverill. “But I thought her influence would be beneficial to Alicia. She is a good disciplinarian.”

“That was the mistake,” said Philippa, rather sadly. “She disciplined too much. I cannot imagine what kind of rebels we should all have been had father and mother not been very loving with us as well as firm.”

Mr. Deverill looked at her attentively, and a sigh escaped his lips. The little suburban home could teach the great home many things, but above all the lesson of kindness—the law of love. He saw his mistake now, though he had done his duty by his children according to his light. The very nature of his constant anxiety about them had caused him to think very strict discipline needful for them. He had sent them away be-

cause he was afraid to undertake the personal responsibility of their upbringing—a tremendous mistake always. Nothing can make up to a child for the lack of wise and tender parental guidance during its impressionable years. Mr. Deverill saw his mistake; its serious consequences had not yet overtaken him.

He was thinking deeply, but did not at the moment give utterance to his thoughts; the burden of which was a sudden, quick sense of the precious gift the fresh, pure, young life was to him, giving to him glimpses of sweetness and purity and strength.

They parted at Liverpool Street, she to continue her journey to Clapton, he and Wingate to Cornhill; and Philippa carried with her a hopeful and happy heart. She enjoyed her day in her old home, but her mother saw with a curious mingling of regret and satisfaction that there was no reluctance when the time came for her to go. Nay, she seemed anxious lest she should miss the train at which Mr. Deverill would meet her. The devoted mother felt, as many mothers have felt, that she had given up her child into other keeping, and that the new relationship had wrought its subtle and inevitable change. Though this is desirable, it is not without its pang for the maternal heart. Mr. Deverill waited her at Liver-

pool Street, and they began their homeward journey all unconscious of any impending evil. Philippa was very gay as they drove from the station, keeping up a lively banter with Wingate, Mr. Deverill listening with a somewhat grave smile. Sometimes he felt oppressed by his strong sense of his wife's extreme youthfulness; how natural it was for her to overflow with happy nonsense when she could get some one to respond. He even felt a vague envy of his son's gift of youth, which once gone is beyond all price, though many would give their thousands to buy it back.

"I wonder how Alicia has been all day. I quite long to see her," said Philippa, as she ran into the house and straight to Alicia's room, surprised almost that the girl had not come to meet her. Alicia's room was empty, and the fire out; the grate with the dead ashes in it somehow sent a chill to Philippa's heart. Before she went to her own room she looked in the drawing-room, but found no Alicia.

"Where is Miss Deverill?" she inquired of Wilson, whom she met in the corridor as she returned to her own room.

Wilson looked somewhat surprised.

"Miss Deverill has gone to London, ma'am, by the twelve-thirty. She took luggage with her."

Philippa grew rather pale.

“To London?” she repeated. “I heard nothing of it this morning. She seemed too ill to get up.”

“She rose, ma’am, whenever you went away, and she was busy all the morning, Susan says, packing. I didn’t see her myself, not being upstairs hardly. I was in the pantry at my silver till tea time. She went away in the cart at twelve, Tebbets driving it, and she had a port-manteau very full.”

“I can’t understand it, Wilson,” said Philippa, too much agitated to hide her alarm. “Ask Mr. Deverill to come up.”

He was on the stairs already and heard her remark.

“What has happened, my dear?” he asked.

“Alicia. She has gone away, Wilson says,” replied Philippa, with a white, frightened face, “at twelve o’clock, taking luggage with her. What can it mean?”

Philippa saw a rapid change come upon her husband’s face. She was glad to follow him into the dressing-room and shut the door.

He sank into a chair, and with a groan covered his face.

Philippa perceived that he feared the worst. The sorrow its master had long dreaded had fallen on Wenleigh Manor.

CHAPTER XIV

ALICIA, with her shabby portmanteau in her hand, arrived at Liverpool Street between two and three o'clock, and took a cab to Fitzroy Square. There was an expression of gloom on the girl's face, which betrayed a troubled mind. The career of which she had dreamed so long appeared less brilliant than of yore. She had taken the irrevocable step, and left her home forever. She believed her father too hard of heart ever to forgive her. She remembered afresh his harshness to her mother, blaming him wholly, too young to understand the depth of humiliation and bitter pain he had suffered in his married life. Alicia was yet a child in knowledge of the world, full of theories, of vague ideas, of crude hopes and ambitions, but of the naked reality of daily life, when stripped of its trappings, she was ignorant as the babe unborn. Had she been less ignorant, unprincipled people could not so easily have traded on her discontent.



"HE SANK INTO A CHAIR, AND COVERED HIS FACE."

The dull threatening sky dropped a few sad raindrops, as the four-wheeler which Alicia had taken to escape observation rumbled slowly through the busy streets. London looked inexpressibly dreary. In the city the fog had scarcely lifted since morning, and the air was bitingly chill. It accorded well with the girl's thoughts. She felt too dull even to be annoyed with herself for her weakness. She only felt an intolerable longing to return; the mere creature comforts of her father's house appealed to her, for she was both cold and hungry, having left home without lunch.

About three o'clock she reached Fitzroy Square, where the Tressiders had apartments. She was expected, and Madame Tressider, even more elaborately attired than usual, welcomed her effusively, and led her into the small, stuffy back drawing-room, where it was close without being warm.

"So you have decided to cast in your lot with us, my love? A thousand welcomes to you!" she said, folding her in an ample embrace from which Alicia visibly shrank.

"Cold, tired, hungry, a little frightened," chattered Madame. "Ah, it will pass; you shall have tea or coffee presently, and then we will talk. How amusing to take such French leave, and how our goody-goody ones will open

their eyes, when they return to find that the bird has burst her prison bars. You have come at a good time, my little one, a brilliant season just commencing. Tressider was but saying last night that there will be an opening for you at once, and your promotion is certain."

Alicia brightened a little, and sat down as Madame directed at the fire. Presently a slatternly little girl brought in a very uninviting-looking tea-tray, and Madame made tea, talking all the while.

"We have but two bedrooms besides this," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "Ugh! how hard are the times! You must be content to share my room for a little till we grow richer. Victor and his father will take the other. You will not be too tired to go to-night to the Liberty. I sing there at half-past nine."

"I should love to go," said Alicia, but without enthusiasm.

"And you will come behind the scenes, and see all the stars, who will welcome you, for poor Nina's sake, whom everybody loved," said Madame, "and to-morrow morning Tressider will try your voice. Ah, here he comes! and Victor—actually Victor, too."

Alicia got up to meet the arbiter of her fate. Mr. Tressider was a large, heavy person, wear-

ing a fur-trimmed coat and a quantity of gem rings on his fingers. He wore his dark hair long, and looked rather foreign, though he was a genuine Cornishman, born at Penzance. His son, who followed, carrying a violin case in his hand, was a rather sickly, foppish-looking youth, who aped the manners of the richer frequenters of the Liberty.

"This is Nina's little girl, Tom," said Madame. "Victor, take off your hat to the daughter of the greatest star the Liberty has ever seen."

Tressider regarded Alicia with one keen glance, bade her a not unkindly welcome, and turned to the study of unpaid bills in his hand. The young man Victor put down his violin case, took off his hat, and bowed himself to the ground. Alicia took an instant and violent dislike to him, which she never overcame. She had when she liked a touch of the haughty Deverill manner. She showed it now, recognizing Victor Tressider by a slight and distant bow. But he was at that offensive age which is distinguished by imperturbable self-complacency. He thought himself charming, and that every girl who saw him shared his opinion. His mother idolized him, and had done her best to spoil a nature not very fine at the beginning. The result was an extremely offensive, vain, and con-

ceited youth, disliked by most of those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. He was a good musician, however, and played in the orchestra at the Liberty Theater, where his mother occasionally appeared, and where his father was secretary. Having divested himself of his overcoat he came and sat down by Alicia, making no attempt to disguise his admiration for her. And certainly the girl looked brilliantly beautiful. The faded charms of Mrs. Tressider and the dingy surroundings seemed only to act as a foil. Alicia was quite unconscious of everything but a vague and engrossing sense of discomfort—a feeling that the actual fell far short of the ideal. She had cast the die, and she felt inclined to think had made a gigantic mistake. When she had finished tea Mrs. Tressider took her into the room she was to occupy, and showed her where to put her wardrobe. Then she returned to the sitting-room and carefully closed the door. Mr. Tressider had disposed of the bills, and was now scanning an evening paper, and enjoying a cigar.

“Well, Tom, have the goodness to be sociable, and tell me what you think of the investment,” said his better half, a trifle sharply.

“She is a stunner,” remarked Victor; but nobody noticed his remark.

"She certainly has looks," said Tressider, thoughtfully. "And she might pay in the end. But do you suppose for a moment that old Dev-erill will let her stay?"

"He mustn't know she's here," replied Madame, who never by any chance affected the foreign idiom when talking to her husband.

Tressider laughed.

"He'll come straight here and kick up a row—that's what you may expect."

"He doesn't know we're here. We were in Bedford Street in Nina's time."

"I suppose he knows the Liberty, and can ask a question as well as any man."

"Leave him to me," said Madame, stoutly. "I've taken this thing in hand, and I'll see it through."

"There's a bit of temper in her eye," observed the reflective Victor, pushing his long fingers through his hair. "I like it in a girl; it's like action in a horse, it shows breeding."

"She'll cost a lot of money to train if her voice is anything," said Tressider, who regarded his son generally with a kind of mild contempt. "If the thing goes on we'll have an agreement hard and fast."

"Oh, we'll keep it in the family," said Ma-

dame, significantly. "There's Victor, and who knows what might happen?"

Tressider finished his cigar and threw it in the fire.

"If you begin that sort of thing, Maria," he said, bluntly, "you'll spoil the whole affair."

CHAPTER XV.

PHILIPPA did not know what her husband feared, and she dared not ask. She looked at him rather helplessly, not knowing what to say.

"Let's go down and ask Wingate," he said at length, rising heavily to his feet. "I have feared this a long time."

"Then do you know where she has gone?" Philippa asked.

"I can guess she has gone back to her mother's friends, and I know what that means. She will follow in her mother's footsteps—will be gay, courted, flattered, happy, she will imagine, for a time, and then she will go into outer darkness, even as poor Nina did."

"If you know who these people are can't you

go and fetch her home?" suggested Philippa, "Take me with you. She might come if I asked her. She seemed to like me a little, I thought, this morning."

Philippa spoke doubtfully, for now nothing seemed certain or to be relied upon.

"We must question Wingate first," he said, and moved toward the door. Philippa followed him; and they met Wingate whistling at the drawing-room door.

"Halloa! what's up?" he inquired, stopping short at sight of their distressed faces.

"Do you know anything of this extraordinary escapade of Alicia's, Wingate?" inquired Mr. Deverill, adopting unconsciously the aggressive tone he always used toward his children.

"Not I; what's up?"

"She's run away," said Mr. Deverill, grimly. "Has she never hinted at such a thing to you?"

"She's hinted at lots of things, and said some plain out, too," replied Wingate. "She was always talking about having a career and doing something to set the Thames on fire. But I thought it was the way girls went on, and never paid any heed."

"You don't know, I suppose, what she went to Southend for?"

Wingate shook his head. "Never knew she'd

been at Southend. Alicia was always a jolly good one for keeping her own counsel."

"You don't know, I suppose, whether she has had any communication lately with a person of the name of Tressider?"

"No, I don't."

"Then there is no more to say. Go down and order the brougham to come round again. The horses will hardly be unharnessed. There is a train at seven o'clock."

"It's half-past six now," said Wingate. "If he looks sharp he can catch it."

Philippa turned round and ran upstairs. Before the brougham came round to the door again she was in the hall dressed in outdoor garb. Wilson busy at the dinner table looked scared.

"We have to return to town, Wilson," Philippa said, thinking some explanation due. "Mr. Wingate will dine alone. Mr. Deverill and I cannot of course return to-night."

"Let me fetch up a plate of hot soup or something, madam," said the kind girl. "It is quite ready."

"Bring it up; if Mr. Deverill can take a mouthful I shall be glad."

Wilson flew to obey, and presently Mr. Deverill came down, and looked astonished to see his wife.

“Where are you going, my dear?”

“With you, of course. My place is with you, surely, at such a time. Don’t send me away, Martin; I am as anxious about poor Alicia as you are!”

Mr. Deverill made no reply, but his mouth twitched. Then Wingate’s wistful face appeared at the library door.

“Wish you’d take me, too. It’ll be so awfully slow for me here, all by myself.”

“Somebody must stay,” said Mr. Deverill, quickly, but something in the boy’s face touched him. “You will not fail me, Wingate. I have not done my duty by you, though God knows I tried to do it. We will begin anew. She will show us how.”

He turned a look of inexpressible trust and affection on his wife.

Wingate, amazed and touched as he had never been in his whole life, replied, a trifle unsteadily:

“Of course, I’ll stay. Don’t take on, dad. Alicia’s always up to tricks, and will, like as not, be home to-morrow.”

Wingate was only a boy, and did not understand. But his father, appreciating his desire to comfort him, wrung his hand, and so there was established between father and son that night an understanding which was never after-

ward disturbed, and which made a certain degree of brightness in the home, even though the other shadow did not lift.

They drove quickly across the sodden roads to Leigh, and just caught the train, which took them into Liverpool Street again at half-past eight. Mr. Deverill took a hansom, and they drove to an address he had in his pocketbook, a house in Bedford Street. He was not much surprised to be told there that the Tressiders had left some time ago, and that their whereabouts was not known to their former landlord.

“What will you do now?” Philippa asked when he entered the cab.

“Go to the theater. The man I want to see is employed there,” he replied, and his mouth took a long, stern curve, which those who knew him best generally feared. But Philippa had been reared in a sunny atmosphere, where that dark specter, fear, had never entered; and she was always unconscious of her husband’s moods, the secret of her great and growing influence over him. She treated him as if he were gentle, unselfish, lovable, like her own father, and it was the sure way to make him so.

The performance at the Liberty Theater was in full swing. Mr. Deverill asked for Mr. Tressider, but was told he could not be seen; his pri-

vate address in Fitzroy Square was willingly given.

"We cannot see them till the performance is over, my dear," he said. "We had better go inside, and then, perhaps, you will better understand the horrible nature of my anxiety."

He paid for a box, and they entered, seating themselves well back. Philippa had never been at a music-hall performance; the Liberty did not differ in any degree from others of its class. She shrank back a little, as was natural, not having been used to such a sight as the ballet being presented on the stage. Mr. Deverill sat grimly, with his arms folded, looking out fixedly, yet seeing but little. The place was haunted by the most bitter memories of many wasted hours and many broken hopes. Time was when Martin Deverill, the wealthy young city merchant, was never absent from his place in the Liberty stalls.

By and by Philippa leaned forward and touched his arm, her face very troubled.

"Oh, Martin, do you think it is a life like this Alicia craves for? We must save her from it. She is worthy of a higher destiny."

"On that stage I first saw her mother. Once the spell of its fascination is cast over Alicia, she

will never return to us. If we can't get her now we may give her up."

There was a restrained anguish in his voice which his wife keenly felt. She sat quite out of sight, not caring to look any longer on the gay figures, who, no doubt, numbered among them many sore hearts.

In the box directly above them sat Alicia, breathless, enchanted, open-eyed and open-eared, forgetful for the moment of everything but the scene before her. Mr. Tressider and two other gentlemen stood behind, enjoying her evident delight.

And so the evening wore to its close. When the performance was over, Mr. Deverill put his wife into a carriage, and waited at the stage-entrance to the theater. He was there, standing when Victor Tressider, with a cigarette in his mouth, emerged into the street. Mr. Deverill did not recognize him, but that sharp-witted youth recognized him, and speedily returned to the theater to give timely warning. It was the easiest matter in the world for Madame and her charge to leave the theater by another door. Mr. Deverill, therefore, waited in vain; and finally drove to the house in Fitzroy Square.

Tressider had not come home with his wife. She sent a message to Mr. Deverill, saying it

was impossible that she could see him that night, but that he might call at eleven o'clock next morning. She declined, through the servant, to answer a single question. Mr. Deverill was baffled. He could do nothing but wait till the interview of the morning.

He therefore directed the cabman to drive them to the Grand Hotel, where they spent the night.

CHAPTER XVI.

PUNCTUALLY at eleven o'clock Mr. Deverill's hansom drove up to the door of the house in Fitzroy Square, and he was at once admitted. He had to wait some little time in the sitting-room before Madame Tressider came to him. She entered quite coolly, and though Mr. Deverill's manner and look were forbidding in the extreme she did not appear in the least embarrassed.

"I was sorry not to see you last night; but I am dead tired when I return from the theater. I hope I see you well, Mr. Deverill."

"I want my daughter," he said, curtly. "You need not deny that she is here."

"She was here last night," said Madame,

frankly. "To-day she has gone into the country with Tressider. Ah, did I not laugh last night when I saw you in the box below her? It was a bit of unrehearsed comedy I most heartily enjoyed."

"You have enticed her away from her home," began Mr. Deverill, passionately, but Madame interrupted him by a languid wave of the hand.

"Oh, I know all you would say. That it is so false does not concern me. Only one thing I will say, she is not a child. She knows her own mind, and she has been under your care for seventeen years, and now when she is of an age to judge for herself, she has deliberately chosen us. We are poor, but we will be kind to her for her mother's sake."

Mr. Deverill's lip curled.

"It is such kindness as she will repudiate when she has learned something of the world's ways. We will leave the past alone, if you please, Madame Tressider. You and I have had some bitter passages in it; it will serve no purpose to recall them now. What I wish to say is, if it is a question of money name your price for the restoration of my daughter."

Madame Tressider's restless eyes gleamed a little, but she was too wily to show that his words interested her at all.

“It is not a question of money. The child’s heart is where her mother’s ever was—in her art,” she said, loftily. “Tressider and I out of pure affection for her will do what we can. The child knows very well that it is an ambition you will thwart to the bitter end.”

“I will, but I give you notice that I shall not give her up until I have seen her, and I shall speedily learn whether undue influence is being used. You will be closely watched, Madame, and I shall be relentless, if there is need.”

Madame fumbled in her pocket and produced a sealed letter.

“Alicia left this for you. I told her you would come, asked if she wished to see you; there was no hesitation in her reply. It is not for you, Mr. Deverill; it is addressed to your new wife.”

Mr. Deverill took it and put it in his pocket. Madame was herself curious concerning the contents; it said something for her that she had not tampered with it in any way. Had she felt less sure of the girl she would have had fewer scruples.

Mr. Deverill felt in a very bitter mood. His brows were bent, his jaws set like iron; in his eyes shone a dark gleam. He knew this woman of old. She had been his wife’s dearest friend, and he knew her to be unscrupulous, untruthful, absolutely without principle. To leave Alicia

there seemed like abandoning a little boat rudderless on a great sea. He felt his own impotence, and it wrung his very soul. It was useless to appeal to her; he felt that he must first see what Alicia had written to his wife, and take further counsel. As he turned to go, he looked her very fully in the face.

“You have some object in view, Madame Tres-sider; what it is I know not. If it is revenge for the past, I forgive you. But this I swear, I will leave no stone unturned to get back my daughter. No good can come to her here. I am casting no reflections on your character; you know as well as I what is the life to which you would introduce her, for what end Heaven alone knows, unless to see her ruined as was her unhappy mother.”

“You insult me, Mr. Deverill, in the absence of my husband and my son,” said Madame Tres-sider, with an assumption of dignity, which might have provoked a smile on her listener’s face, had he been less anxious and unhappy.

Without another word or parting salutation of any kind, he left the house and re-entered the cab, where his wife sat trembling with anxiety.

“She is not there; they took her out of town to escape my visit,” he said, curtly, in reply to her

anxious look. "Read what she says. It is addressed to you."

Philippa took the letter, surprised to see the seal unbroken. There was no sort of ambiguity about Alicia's communication, which ran as follows:

"DEAR MRS. DEVERILL—I write to you rather than to my father because I know you will understand and be less hard upon me than he will."

Philippa would have spared him these words, but he read with her, and she could not soften them in any way.

"This step I have taken," the letter continued, "is not taken on the impulse of the moment. I have always meant to follow in my mother's footsteps. Nothing will ever satisfy me but a public career. I know I shall succeed. I feel it in my inmost heart. I had to wait till I was old enough or I should have run away from Cambridge long ago. I wish now I had run away before you came, because it would have been easier. I felt a good deal sneaking away from you yesterday. I have only known you a week, but I have never met anybody I liked so much. I hope I shall see you again some day. Perhaps

when I become as famous as I mean to be you will not be ashamed to shake hands with me. I promise you this. I am not very old, but I know a good deal more than you do, I believe; I will never forget that you would like me to be good. You may tell papa that, wherever he may meet me again, he need not be ashamed. He may be very angry, but he will never be ashamed. And tell him from me not to make Wenleigh a jail for you as he did for my mother, and that though you are a woman you may have some rights. I am one of the sort that take my rights without waiting to have them given me. If you don't do that some time you may live and die without them. Don't worry about me. I'll turn up again and report myself.

“You may tell papa nobody has coerced me to do this, and not a soul has seen this letter. I do not like the people I am living with, and never shall. Madame Tressider thinks I am a child, and treats me like one, but I am a woman in some things, and my eyes are wide open. Now I need not write any more.

“I remain yours truly,

“ALICIA DEVERILL.

“P.S—Wingate is a good sort, and will be a comfort to you. I send him my love.”

This odd epistle produced diverse emotions in the minds of the pair who perused it together. It had its amusing side, which Philippa could not help seeing, and it certainly gave Mr. Deverill a glimpse into the mind of his daughter which astonished him.

"I have tried to keep her a child, and she has never been one," he said, gravely. "What a letter for a girl of seventeen to write, and what do you think of it, and what are we to do now?"

Philippa had no hesitation in replying.

"Alicia must be seen. I must see her if possible, and she must be made to understand at once that her career, her ambition, are our affair, yours and mine, and that, instead of thwarting her, we will do our best to satisfy her desire for a career."

Mr. Deverill turned to his wife in the greatest possible surprise

"Would you then encourage her in the career she has chosen so mistakenly, knowing nothing of its pitfalls, its hardships, its bitter side?"

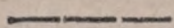
"I should direct her ambition into healthier channels, Martin. If she has a voice it can be trained for use. She might even be able to do great good with it. The mistake with Alicia has been restraining her too much. She must have scope, or, as she says here, she will take it."

“Oh, how blind I have been!” said Mr. Deverill, with a sigh. “I would to God I had met you before, Philippa, and so given to my children a companion so wise, so tender, so truly good.”

These were sweet words, which sent a glow to Philippa’s heart.

“I leave the matter entirely in your hands, Philippa; you can spend as you like, and do as you think best. And if Alicia comes back, which I pray God she will, her future shall be left to you.”

The days went by, no stone was left unturned, no effort spared, but Alicia Deverill came no more to Wenleigh Manor.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE table was laid for the Christmas dinner at Wenleigh Manor. The dining-room, a quaint old room, paneled in black oak and furnished in exquisite harmony, presented a bright, cheerful, homelike picture that Christmas Eve. The logs were piled high in the old dog-grate, and the light lay warm and ruddy on the table so exquisitely arranged with wealth of Christmas roses and some early snowdrops, which the mild De-

cember days had tempted to peep out before their time. The chairs were set for the guests, a goodly array, though it was only a family party such as gathered there as every Christmas Eve came round. Outside the snow fell royally, and those who loved to see the hedgerows white at yule were gratified, though there were some to whom the white benediction was less welcome. It was now half-past six, at seven the guests would gather round the Christmas board. The mistress of the house came presently to see that all was in readiness. She entered the room in that quick, graceful way peculiar to her, and as she stood, just within the doorway, made an unconscious picture. The years which had brought no change to Wenleigh, had wrought but little change in her. She still looked very young, very girlish, and there was a sweetness in her look, a still, lovely quiet in her eyes which betokened a heart at rest. She wore a very rich gown of black silk, and the neck, the priceless lace revealed rather than hid, was white as the falling snow. She wore her years serenely, her wifedom and motherhood had brought out all that was loveliest in that lovely nature, had intensified its sweetness and made it a strong, gracious, and perfect thing. Many blessed the name of Martin Deverill's second wife; many envied

him his happiness and his home. Her face was quite grave as she regarded the exquisite decorations her hands had planned; there was none of that bright elation natural in the circumstances. Christmas every year deepened the one shadow which lay upon Philippa's heart—the shadow which was there always, and which she now feared would no more lift from her own life and her husband's — the shadow that fell the day Alicia went away. There were two little girls now in the Manor nursery, and very often was Philippa's heart filled to overflowing by his great unspeakable tenderness toward these two. He could not bear to hear them chided, to see a cloud upon their faces. The ordinary griefs of childhood which weeps over a broken toy or the crossing of a childish whim, were intolerable to him. It was no use to reason with him. He would only shake his head, and say mournfully:

“Hush, hush, Philippa; I cannot forget. Don't let me sow a second bitter harvest.”

And then she became silent because she knew he thought of his lost child, whom they had never heard of since that bitter day five years ago. Philippa thought of her as she looked at the chairs, and said to herself that had one been set for Alicia life would have no more to offer. She was still standing, her hand on the back of the

old oak chair, when her husband came to seek her. Time had dealt gently, too, with Martin Deverill, and his was a strong, beautiful, trust-inspiring face, from which the old-time sternness had forever gone. He had become, through his wife's influence, gentle of heart as a little child. Great happiness had made him humble and grateful, just as former misery had hardened and embittered. But sometimes he had a grave, weary look, because he felt that an answer withheld to many prayers indicated that the follies and the mistakes of his earlier manhood had not yet been atoned for. Quick to catch the shadow on his wife's dear face, he laid his hand on her shoulder and turned her to him.

"Dearest, what is it?"

"Nothing; only the old sorrow. I was but saying to myself that if Alicia could sit down with us my cup would be full. I think about her every day I live, Martin; of late she has been in my thoughts continually. I am more than ever certain that she is not dead."

He did not speak, and she laid her hand against his cheek.

"It is better to speak of it, dear, a little to-night. I know what is in your heart as you know mine. I have such a strange feeling, dearest, as if Alicia would come somehow; as

if she were not far away. I have had it all day. I suppose it is with thinking of her all day. Have I vexed you needlessly, dear?"

"No, I was but asking myself what I am that you should take such loving interest in me and mine."

"Oh, Martin, you foolish, foolish man," she cried with a mirth-provoking smile, though inwardly tempted to throw herself on his breast.

"Wingate and Mary must have arrived. There is such a noise. Fancy Wingate with a wife of his own—Wingate, who was such a boy when I came to Wenleigh."

The merry voices in the hall drew them away from that quiet moment, and they went to welcome the happy young pair who had only been married a month ago, and had hurried home in time to dine at Wenleigh on Christmas Day. Wingate's wife in her marriage gown was a sight to see—a creature so radiant in her youthfulness and overflowing gladness that she carried sunshine everywhere. So they all trooped to the drawing-room, where we find Reginald Craven and his wife and all the children, though some of them are children no longer, Anna being a clergyman's wife, and Lucy newly engaged to a friend of Stansfield's, also present that night. It was a happy family party, and when they all

went down and took their seats it was noticed that there was a vacant chair between Mr. Deverill and Philippa; and nobody said a word, for a sudden hush of expectancy fell upon them; and Mr. Deverill was evidently too much agitated to speak.

“It is my doing, dears,” said Philippa, with a faint, unsteady smile. “You all know what is the only shadow upon our happy hearts. I have been praying all the year for Alicia to come back, and I thought to-day, quite suddenly, how absurd and wicked it was to pray always and expect nothing, and somehow I think Alicia will come to-night, and now we are ready for her, and she will see that we have thought of her, and loved her all the time.”

Nobody had anything ready to say in reply to this little speech of Philippa's, but even as the meal went on, and the talk rose and fell in a pleasant murmur, there were moments when the hush of expectancy fell upon them again, and they almost waited for the opening of the door.

Before the Christmas pudding was brought in all ablaze, the two little girls all in white, with dancing eyes and cheeks pink with excitement, came from their nursery, and room was made for them, but the empty chair remained with the



silver in the place before it, and the serviette with its little red sprig of holly stood up stiff and neat, waiting for the absent fingers to smooth its glossy folds.

And somehow it was no surprise to any, though a hush of awe, which was almost fear, came upon them, when there was a great ring at the bell, and then there came a sound which no one had thought to hear—the lisp of a baby's voice. Philippa rose up, trembling, looking to the door, the color coming fitfully in her face. Her husband's was deadly pale, and he sat motionless as a statue, while his little daughter made a great clatter on the table with her silver spoon, and then the door opened, and there entered a tall and slim figure, clad in dark garments, and she had, clasped in her arms, a little child. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, but went straight to her father's chair and knelt there, and her face, lovely in its anguish, in its passionate appeal, was Alicia's face—the same, yet not the same, for the girl was gone forever, and it was the face of a woman who had drunk the cup of life to the dregs. She spoke, seemingly forgetful of all present, save the white marble face of her father, from which her eyes never traveled for a moment, and her words fell strangely upon the ears of those who

listened, and buried themselves in their hearts, never to be forgotten.

“I have come back, papa, bringing my little child. We have no home upon earth, he and I, but only here. I have come back because I know now, through him, what I did in leaving you. When I looked in at the window and saw the vacant chair and your face beside it, a warmth came to my starved heart; but for that I should not have dared to come. Am I forgiven, father, and will you let me sleep here this one night, till I dream again what it is to have a home?”

Philippa got up, and, as she made one beckoning wave to the door, her face shone and her eyes were radiant like the stars.

“God has answered my prayer. He is here,” she said. “Let us go.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE little child with Alicia's eyes and mouth slept soundly in the bed, its soft breath scarcely stirring the eiderdown above it. In the old basket-chair, where Alicia had dreamed away so many idle hours, sat Philippa, and the wanderer half sat, half knelt, upon the floor beside her with her head upon her knee. The garments that the snow had wet were now exchanged for a soft crimson dressing-gown of Philippa's, and the tired face looked a little less tired, and had a new peace set upon it. Philippa's hand, gentle, soft, caressing, touched the sunk head tenderly, as a mother might, and there was a love most motherly in her eyes.

"You see we have kept the room. Nobody has ever slept in it since you went away. Once the house was very full, and I gave up my own room, and had a bed in the schoolroom, lest you might come back that very night and feel that there was no room."

Alicia took a quick breath like a sob and folded her in her arms.



"I LOOKED IN AT THE WINDOW AND SAW THE VACANT CHAIR."

“You thought I would come back,” she said. “Papa has told me how you have always said it. How did you know?”

“I knew,” Philippa answered, “that one day—perhaps through bitter sorrow, but certainly somehow—your heart would awaken to your father, and you would know that nothing on earth can destroy that tie which God has made. Cruelty may weaken it; but death only can break it. But I did not think it would be through motherhood. Oh, my poor Alicia, my poor dear girl, how you must have suffered!”

“I have a husband,” said Alicia, calmly; but Philippa saw how her breast heaved with her quick breathing. “A husband whom I despise, with whom I cannot live and respect myself. I thought,” she said, falteringly, “that perhaps you would take care of my little child for me while I went to work for it. It was very humiliating to come back, and I fought the desire as long as I could, but your eyes drew me back, and the longing to see my father became quite intolerable.”

“As I knew it would,” said Philippa, quietly. “You will never quit us any more, my darling; I am going to leave you now to go to bed. One day, when you are able, perhaps you will tell me it all.”

"I wish to tell you now," answered Alicia. "I shall sleep the sounder for it, if I sleep at all. I will make it short; and you are so quick to understand that I shall be able to leave details."

"Go on," said Philippa, very tenderly, and her clasp of the slender fingers tightened.

Alicia looked steadily in the fire for a few minutes and then began:

"Soon after I had written that letter to papa—in fact only two days afterward—we went to Manchester to live."

"You mean the Tressiders?"

"Yes. Mr. Tressider got an appointment at one of the theaters there and had to leave at once, and there my education began."

"Your education for the stage?"

Alicia nodded, and a slight weary smile touched her lips.

"Madame gave me lessons in dancing. Mr. Tressider trained my voice, and Victor tried to teach me the violin; it was a family concern."

"Who is Victor?"

"Victor Tressider, my husband. I am one of them now—at least I was; but I have left them, never to go back.

"This sort of thing went on for about a year, and I was so sick of the whole thing I could

have run away ten times over. But they had me bound hand and foot by my obligations to them. Madame was perpetually telling me how much I owed them, and I knew I was in their debt for the very food I ate. It was bitter as gall to me. By-and-by I had some singing lessons from a master, not Tom Tressider, and he told me I had a fortune in my voice. After that I took courage and tried to look ahead to the time when I should be independent of them. I played once or twice minor parts on the stage, and when I could do that I forgot the sordid degradation of my position, and would even think my old ambition still a possible thing. All the time that horrible Victor Tressider paid me attentions, and they all spoke from the first as if it were quite settled that I was to marry him. He was such a fool, so empty-headed, so devoid of every manly quality that the thought of it made me shudder. Yet Mrs. Victor Tressider I became in due course, just as they had planned from the beginning."

"But how did they manage it, Alicia?" Philippa asked. "You used to be a strong-willed person, not easily influenced or—"

"I thought I was, but they broke my spirit among them. I don't know how it was done; but it seemed to me, after a long course of nag-

ging over my ingratitude, that there was no other course open to me. They said, too, that it was my only chance of success, that the name of Tressider even would help me, and that they, of course, would use their influence more strenuously for one of their own."

"Had they any influence?" asked Philippa. "I do not know very much about theatrical matters, but their name does not seem to be held in high repute."

Alicia laughed, and Philippa did not like the sound.

"I was too young and ignorant to know that they were of no account whatever. They played upon my ignorance, especially Madame, in a way which might have opened my eyes in time.

"Well, at the end of two years, just before I was to make the grand *début* they were always talking about, I married Victor Tressider."

"Caring nothing for him, Alicia?" said Mrs. Deverill. "That was the greatest mistake of all."

"Not only caring nothing for him, but despising him with my whole soul. But I had grown desperate through the humiliation of my position, and was too young and ignorant to know that had I gone with my voice to almost any man-

ager in London my fortune and his would have been made."

"Well," said Philippa, with intense interest, for Alicia had paused a moment as if not caring to proceed.

"Well, I married him; and then the bitterness of death began."

"Was he unkind to you, my dear?"

"Not actively—at least at first. It was only after I lost my voice that I saw through their hollowness, and knew what all their pretenses had meant."

"Did you lose your voice?"

"Yes, about twelve months after my marriage we were touring in the provinces; and I was playing a leading part for the first time, and beginning to taste the sweetness of success, when I took a serious illness. I was in bed for two months, and when I got up again my voice was gone."

"Never to come back?"

"They did not give me much hope, and certainly it has not come back, though it is two years now since my illness."

"Well, what then?"

"Then the Tressiders showed themselves in their true light, Madame especially making no effort to hide her anger and disappointment.

She even told me I had spoiled her son's life. Old Tressider himself was the least unkind of all."

"And what did you do?"

"I had to work, but there were some things I would not do; some parts I would not play, though they had killed me. My own intuitions were too strong; and I paid no attention to their threats. Oh, the sordid misery of it all! I had one or two kind friends among those employed at the theater, or I think I must have died."

"And so after a time you could bear it no longer, and came away?"

Alicia nodded.

"After the child came I made up my mind. I loved him, though I never had a common liking even for his father; and I resolved that he should be saved from their contamination. I thought of you as one thinks of an impossible heaven. Through all these terrible years you have been a secret refuge to me, for I could steal to you in thought and dwell upon your sweetness, your goodness; you seemed to stand to me in the place of God."

"Oh, hush, hush! Yet you left me, Alicia," said Philippa, with a great mournfulness. "But peace and some happiness are possible to you; pray for it even yet. Your father will never let

you go any more, dear: you saw that in his face."

"I did, and I heard him say it, too. Thank God, thank God!" cried Alicia. And then she bent her head, and a great tempest shook her, as the winter winds shake the unsheltered trees.

"Do they know where you have gone?"

"They do not care; and if they do know, they will not seek me. I am no further use. I cannot earn enough to make me valuable in their eyes; they are glad to be rid of me."

Philippa glanced toward the bed.

"But your husband may cause you trouble for the child's sake. He may wish to have him."

"If he does I am ready for him," said Alicia, with a slow, quiet, exceeding bitter smile. "The law is not always just to women, but this time it will be on my side, and very well Victor Tressider knows it. I spoke very plainly to him before I went away, and he will trouble me no more."

Philippa folded her arms round the drooping figure, as if she would never let it go again.

"Oh, Alicia, if you had but trusted us!" was the unavailing cry that rose to her lips.

A light tap at the door disturbed them, and Wingate's wife, in a trailing dressing-gown, peeped in, a little timidly.

“May I come in?” she asked, with her sunny smile. “I am going to bed; but I want to see Wingate’s sister—and mine.”

Alicia rose and looked at the girlish figure, the sweet face framed by sunny hair and lighted by eyes as blue as Italian skies; and a kind of content gathered in her own.

“Wingate has done well, has he not?” she asked, turning to Philippa. “When I see what happy marriage can be my own folly seems the greater. I will talk to you to-morrow, dear; I am not very well to-night.”

She returned the sisterly kiss tenderly—nay, with a certain touching look of gratitude which sent Mary Deverill back to her husband with her own eyes wet.

“I had lost belief in everything,” she said, as the door closed. “But I believe it will live again. I did not think that such forgiveness and love were possible out of heaven.”

Philippa said nothing. She was bending over the bed where the child, Martin Deverill Tressider, lay in his unconscious sleep; and her heart, weighed down by a great bitterness because of the blight that had fallen on the girl’s life, uplifted itself in earnest, nay passionate prayer:

“Life is not over, dear,” she said at last. “There is much left, and hope will spring anew.”

“If God will,” Alicia answered, and her tears fell like summer rain.

After a time, long, sad, and weary, hope awoke to its second spring in Alicia’s heart. God restored to her her gift of song. And that precious heritage which had first been her undoing, being consecrated to higher service, became the benediction of her life, sweetening all things and making the future rich with possibilities. And after a long time, when the man whose name she bore had lived out his short and ill-spent life, she used it again in public in aid of the sick, the suffering, and the sad. I am not permitted here to reveal all; but those who hear that gifted singer plead through these heaven-born notes for love and mercy and sweet compassion toward all suffering humanity know that the music which stirs in them all that is noblest and best, and most near to the divine, has been wrung from a heart touched by the keenest sorrow a woman’s heart can know. She is always ready for the good work lying to her hand, and the atonement thus permitted to her has brought to her face a lovely peace which those who love her, and these are very many, rejoice to see. Yet there abides on her calm brow always the seal of a great sadness, the fruit of the tree of knowledge having been so bitter to the taste. She abides always in the old

Manor House of Wenleigh, and her boy grows up side by side with Philippa's children, and they are as one happy family. And though Philippa sees how exquisite is the bond between father and daughter, and how often Alicia's arm is given to her father as they walk, she suffers no jealous pang. Her large, generous heart has room for nothing but pure joy that it is so. And her own place is sure. She is the beloved center of that happy home; and the words of the wise man might be writ large as her crown:

“The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. Her children arise up and call her blessed.”

THE END.

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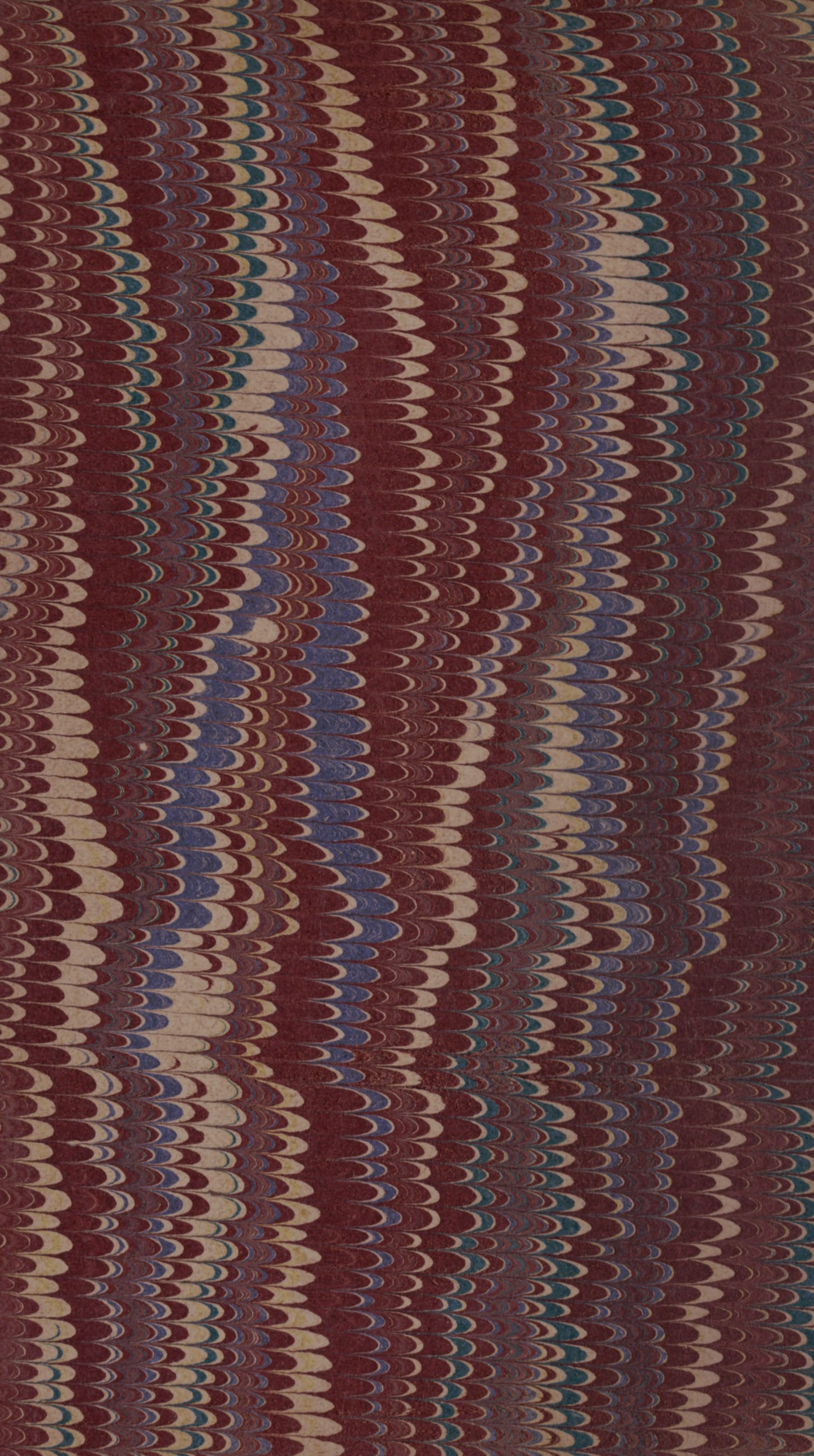
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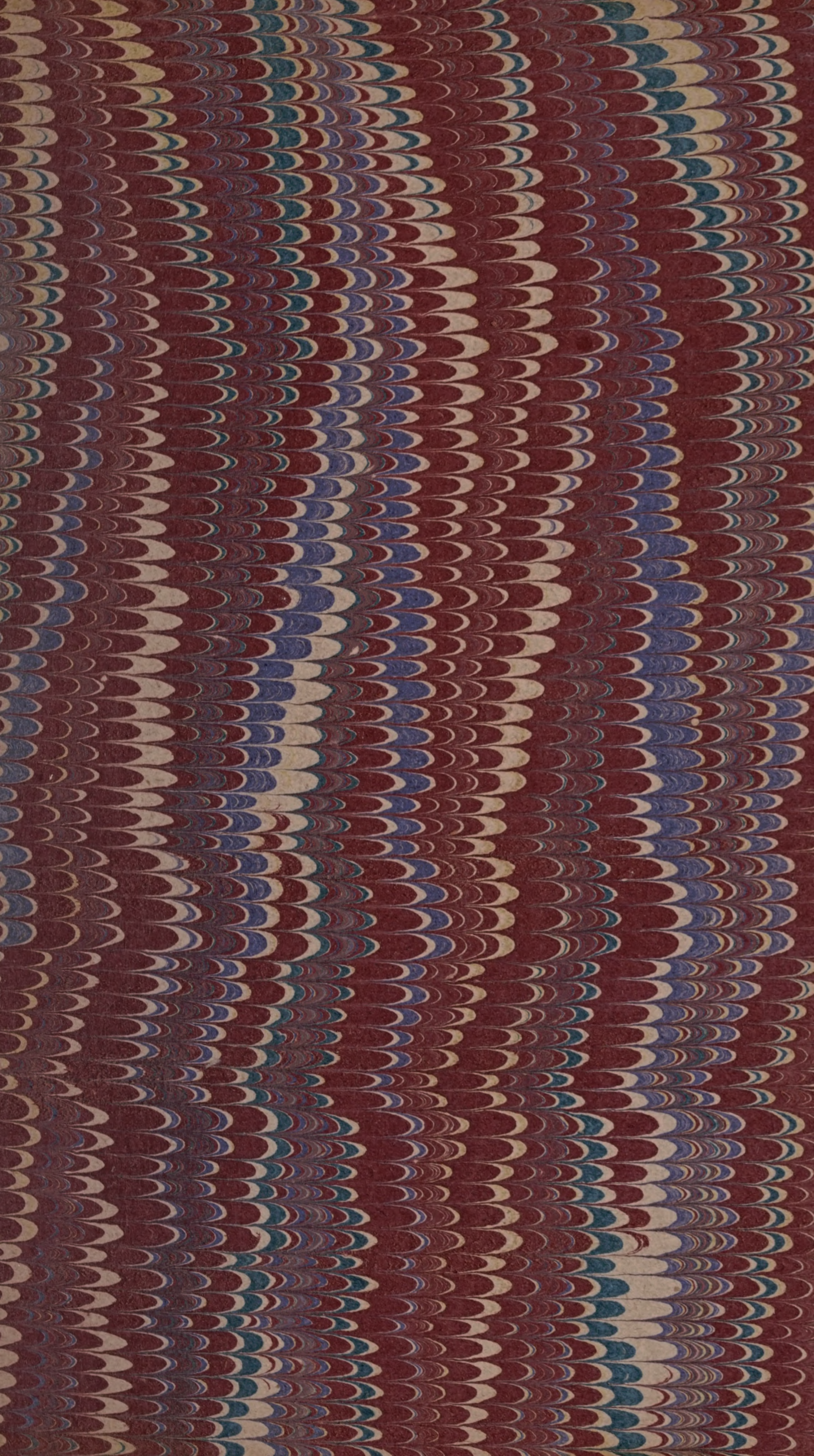
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